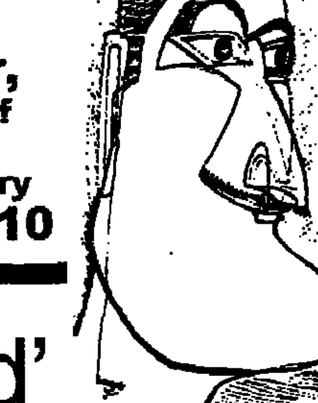
Al-Ahram Weekly

No335 الاهرام ويكلي

Published in Cairo by AL-AHRAM established in 1875

24 - 30 July 1997 18 Pages P.T.75



Nasser, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10





'Fundamentals of struggle unchanged'

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak said yesterday the birth of an Arab common market would be the first step towards regional economic integration that would serve the Arabs' interests as well as the cause of comprehensive and just peace.

Mubarak, in a nationwide radio and television broadcast marking the 45th anniversary of the 1952 July revolution, noted that despite the radical changes that have occurred internationally and domestically, the "fundamentals of the Egyptian struggle, embodied by the revolution," remain unchanged.

"We do not aim to establish a market that is closed upon itself, but seek it as a beginning for regional integration and wide-scale international cooperation, serving the Arabs' interests as well as the interests we share with the others," Mubarak said.

"Our sure interest is to have good relations with all parties, and use these relations to serve the interests of Egypt, our Arab nation and the cause of just and comprehensive peace that is bound to triumph despite all the obstacles."

Mubarak hailed the 1952 army coup that overthrew King Farouk and brought Gamal Abdel-Nasser to power as "a unique revolution that changed, without violence, the features of life on the land of Egypt, removed the occupation forces from the major part of the Arab world and hoisted the banners of freedom and independence throughout the Third World."

But he said the world scene has changed since then. "The era of polarisation and the Cold War has ended: the balances of forces have changed: the international centres of influence have shifted; and the technology and communication revolution have brought the world to the threshold of a new age," he said.

These international changes were accompanied by equally radical domestic changes. It was only natural that Egypt would work to sanction democracy and the supremacy of law, "that constitutional legality replace revolutionary legality," Mubarak added.

These factors, said Mubarak, have consolidated political, economic and social stability and made it possible to confront extremism and terrorism "decisively and firmly, without violating the supremacy of law," he said.

The door was also flung open for private enterprise to contribute to society's development and to a "giant and brave economic upsurge," Mubarak said.

And yet the "fundamentals of Egyptian struggle embodied by the revolution" remain the same: "the independence of national decision-making, supporting social justice and the rights of the people's sweeping majority, striving to establish a strong Arab entity capable of confronting challenges and building a powerful army capable of protecting national security," he said.

Iranian offer

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak has revealed that Iran is seeking military cooperation with Egypt in the face of the growing military ties between Turkey and Israel. However, the possibility needed careful consideration before any decision could be reached, he added.

He told honours graduates of the military and police academies on Tuesday that agreements signed recently between Turkey and Israel have worried neighbouring countries, including Iran, which, "has tried to establish military relations with Egypt." However, he continued, "we cannot take an immediate decision on this matter because we do not rush into such decisions."

Golan block

THE ISRAELI parliament yesterday voted in favour of a bill aimed at blocking a withdrawal from the Syrian Golan Heights. The bill's text, AFP reported, *stipulates that a decision to* withdraw from the strategic plateau must be approved by a two-thirds majority, or 80 MPs out of the 120-member Knesset.

The bill, approved by 43 votes to 40 at yesterday's first reading, must pass three readings in parliament before it becomes law. It was proposed by an MP from the ultra-nationalist Tsomet Party and supported by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and most of his ministers.

Peace talks between Syria and Israel have been on ice since February last year.

Young racists

A MAJORITY of Israeli teenagers aged between 16 and 18 have racist feelings against Arabs and immigrants from the former Soviet Union, according to a poll carried out by Haifa University and published by the *Yediot Aharonot* newspaper yesterday.

The survey, AFP reported, found 61.7 per cent of Jewish youngsters are opposed to giving equal rights to the 800,000 strong Arab population while 65.1 per cent believe Arabs could not be trusted. Around three quarters of the teenagers polled said that the presence of Arab deputies in the Israeli parliament threatened the country's security and felt Israel would be better off if only Jews were allowed to live there.

Law slammed

ISRAELI human rights groups have condemned proposed legislation which would ban most Palestinians from seeking damages from Israel for injuries suffered during the Palestinian uprising that ended in 1993.

The bill would classify the six-year "Intifada" as a war and so Israel would not be liable for damages under existing laws. The Israeli human rights group B'tselem said the bill was a legal recipe for impunity for Israeli soldiers.

In a related development, human rights organisations warned of violence if the Jerusalem municipality went ahead with its plans to demolish 150 illegally built Arab homes in Arab East Jerusalem in October.

US pushes package deal

While Washington is reportedly preparing a new peace initiative, conflicting signals emerged from a meeting in Brussels

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat yesterday played down talk of a breakthrough in the stalled Middle East peace negotiations.

"Nothing was achieved yesterday," Arafat *told a news conference in Brussels* the day after he met Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy for the first time since April.

"I am looking to achieve something concrete," Arafat said. "We are not asking *for the moon. We are asking that what* was signed at the White House be implemented completely and successfully."

Arafat's remarks were in sharp contrast to the confident statements he and Levy had *made following Tuesday night's meeting.*

"Significant and positive steps have been taken," Arafat had then told reporters. "We have to continue these meetings."

Levy said he was "very satisfied" with what he heard from Arafat.

Israel has demanded Arafat arrest Palestinian police accused by Israelis of ordering an attack on a rabbi in the West Bank.

Israeli political sources said Levy had agreed that the joint committees concerned with opening Gaza air and sea ports and establishing a "safe passage" between the West Bank and Gaza should resume once Israel was satisfied Arafat had taken action against the police involved in the incident.

Before Levy and Arafat had ended their Brussels talks, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's emissary said in Washington that the Palestinian Authority needed to do more to control violence before peace talks could resume.

"Unfortunately what we see is a real lack of effort on the Palestinian side," cabinet secretary Danny Naveh said after meeting US Middle East peace coordinator Dennis Ross at the State Department.

Palestinian security officials on Monday arrested a senior police officer accused by Israel of ordering attacks on Jewish targets.

Netanyahu said he had dispatched Naveh to Washington with new proposals to try to end the crisis which began last March when Israel broke ground on a new Jewish *settlement in occupied East Jerusalem.*

Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said in Washington last week the US was preparing a "package deal" of measures to end the deadlock.

Israeli media reports said the US is working on an ambitious proposal to sweep aside the crisis with a six-month crash negotiation towards a final peace settlement. If the sides agree, Secretary of *State Madeleine Albright will come to the* region in September for the first time since assuming her position to announce the new talks, Israeli Television said.

Naveh said that Israel supported "the advancement of... fast-pace negotiations on final status that will... lead to the central issues."

In Jerusalem, Mahmoud Abbas, a senior Palestinian official and architect of Israeli-PLO peace deals, held surprise talks Tuesday night with Israeli President Ezer Weizman. Egypt's ambassador to Israel, Mohamed Bassiouni, was present at the meeting, Israeli Television said.

"The discussions were within the framework of pushing the peace process forward," Abbas told Reuters.

According to The Associated Press, the reported US proposal faces at least two hurdles: the Palestinians are reluctant to enter final-status talks with Netanyahu's conservative government, and Netanyahu opposes Arafat's demand for a halt to settlement-building.

Israeli and Palestinian newspapers said the *US is proposing that in return for a six-*month freeze on settlements, Israel would not have to carry out the withdrawal from rural West Bank areas set for next fall while the new talks proceed. *(see p.4)*



BROTHERS IN ARMS: President Gamal Abdel-Nasser with Che Guevara. The discovery of Che's remains, 45 years after the 23 July revolution, is a poignant reminder of the heady days of Third World revolution and solidarity

How big a first step?

Will he stop the perpetual stream of violence? Amira Howeidy interviews Abbassi Madani by telephone and examines the prospects for peace in Algeria following his release

When Abbassi Madani, leader of the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), was released last week there was, it was widely reported, no deal behind President Liamine Zeroual's surprise decision to free him. *But four days later,* the official Algerian Press Service (APS) reported a series of "conditions" laid down by Interior Minister Mustafa Ben Mansour which, it said, Madani was expected to follow.

These "conditions" prohibit Madani from engaging in political activity, participating in public meetings or demonstrations, making verbal or written statements to the press and media as well as any action that could lead to the "disturbance of peace and order."

According to sources close to the ministry, the announcement of these "conditions" following — and not before — Madani's release should be viewed as a warning to the Islamic Front leader. In response, Madani's defence team filed a lawsuit, contesting the Interior Ministry's decision as both "illegal and unconstitutional."

Madani was arrested in June 1991 and sentenced a year later by a military court to 12 years in jail for threatening Algeria's security after the army cancelled elections that the FIS was poised to win. More than 60,000 people have been killed in the conflict between the government and the Islamists since then.

In a long-distance telephone interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Madani, speaking from Algiers, insisted that controversy over his legal status is not a primary concern. "All I think about now is *how to get Algeria out of* [the crisis] it is going through," he said.

Asked why the Algerian authorities have not released his firebrand deputy Ali Belhaj, Madani snapped back: "This question should be addressed to the authorities."

Madani's release, halfway through his 12-year sentence, was interpreted as a gesture of good will on the part of Zeroual's 19-month-old government. But sceptics say his release will not be enough to prompt the FIS to ask its fighters to cease fire.

Asked whether the Front's military wing, the Islamic Salvation Army, will reverse its militant policy to comply with his plans to restore peace to Algeria, Madani responded in vague terms. "Right now, I am addressing all the Algerians and I think that those you mentioned will be the first to respond to that," he said. Madani did not denounce violence, saying "this is not my issue."

According to Ali Yehia Abdel-Nour, spokesman for Madani's defence team, "Madani was released unconditionally upon the orders of the defence minister [President Zeroual]. When the defence minister releases a prisoner unconditionally, how can the interior minister interfere and issue a conflicting decision?"

Until the High Court takes a decision on the appeal, three to five months from now, Abdel-Nour said, Madani "is free to exercise his rights as any Algerian citizen. He is only prohibited from talking about the FIS because it was officially dissolved in 1992."

Madani's release and his vow to "do all that we can to end this situation" may not be enough to restore peace to the strife-torn country, said Graham Fuller, a former American intelligence officer and expert on Algerian affairs. "I don't think Madani's release by itself will be that important, but it could be an important first step in the right direction. We have to *wait and see," Fuller told the Weekly.*

On the other hand, Fuller pointed out, there are not enough reasons to believe that the Zeroual regime will be able to introduce the necessary changes to bring political and social peace to the country. But if he is skillful and clever, Fuller said, he could use his present strong position to gradually bring the Islamists, even if not under the name of the FIS, into the political order.

In a study published by the Rand Corporation a year ago under the title *Algeria: the next fundamentalist state?*, Fuller stressed the necessity of the participation of the FIS if national and social reconciliation is to be achieved. But now Fuller is not so sure. "I fear the cultural gap between the FIS and the military is too great and that this government will not be able to bridge the gap," he said.

The motives behind Madani's "political release," as the Algerian press calls it, will become clearer when the fate of Belhaj is determined. Algeria-watchers believe Zeroual wants to release Belhaj but has to persuade the army's hardliners who believe that he has direct links to the radical Armed Islamic Group (GIA). But should Zeroual feel he has formed a strong enough power base, they say, Belhaj, along with more than 1,000 FIS detainees, can expect to regain their freedom by the end of this year. *(For full text of interview with Madani, see p. 5)*

INSIDE

Ibrahim Nafie: Perennial calls for pruning 10

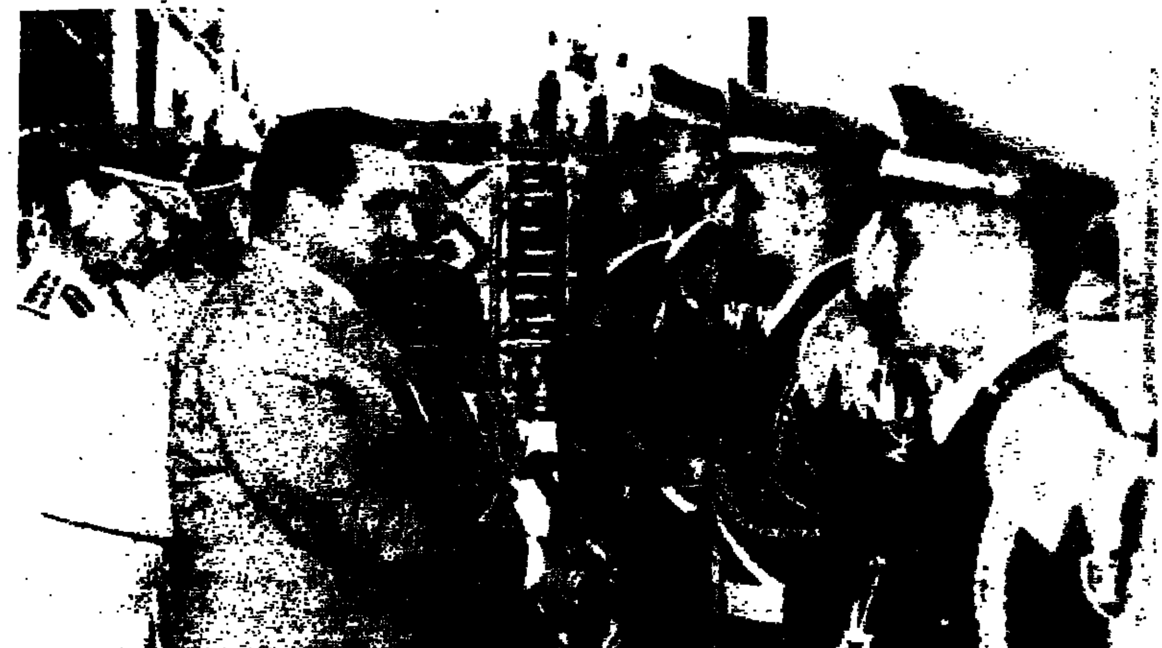


Edward Said: Return to Lebanon 11



Through the hourglass 15





GRADUATING BRASS: President Hosni Mubarak this week attended three graduation ceremonies: at the Technical Military Academy, the Mubarak Police Academy and the Military Academy. He was accompanied by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and a large number of ministers, officials and public figures at all three events.



On Saturday, in his capacity as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Mubarak was at the Technical Military Academy to inaugurate its renovated headquarters in Heliopolis. The next day the president visited the Mubarak Police Academy, attending the graduation of over 1,200 officers.



The guests were treated to a fitness and exercise demonstration at the newly-constructed police academy, located in the satellite city of New Cairo.

On Monday, Mubarak watched another group of young officers at the Military Academy take part in military parades as part of the graduation ceremony for the 91st graduating class.

Arab unity at the grassroots

Arab political parties and NGOs expressed indignation at UN sanctions imposed against some Arab states and urged a complete freeze of relations with Israel. Nevine Khalil attended their first Arab solidarity conference

Nearly 100 delegates from across the Arab political spectrum gathered in Cairo this week to take part in the first Arab conference for political parties and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Representatives of over 40 Arab political parties, NGOs and professional unions from Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, the Maghreb, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Sudan convened under the banner "Towards Arab Solidarity" to discuss Arab affairs and ways of boosting Arab solidarity and cooperation.

The conference, organised by the Egyptian Committee for Solidarity, ended its deliberations on the eve of the 45th anniversary of Egypt's 1952 revolution, which brought Gamal Abdel-Nasser to power. Abdel-Nasser was a champion of Arab unity and solidarity in a confrontation with the West. The main topics of discussion at the conference were the peace process and its obstruction by the Likud government, normalising relations with Israel, economic integration, the containment of Iraq and Libya by Western powers, the democratisation process and human rights, as well as education and Arab culture.

At the end of the two-day conference which began on Monday, a long list of recommendations was issued, calling for regular Arab summits with Iraq's participation, an Arab common market, the lifting of the sanctions imposed on Iraq, Libya and Sudan as well as the institutionalisation of the democratic process in Arab political systems. The conference formed a delegation of intellectuals and public figures who would visit the Gulf countries in an attempt to ease the tensions between them and Iraq.

Participants also condemned Israeli policies towards the Palestinians and the peace process and strongly criticised America's "bias in favour of the Israeli onslaught". Support was voiced for Syria and Lebanon — parts of whose territories are under Israeli occupation — as well as Iraq which is struggling against crippling UN sanctions imposed seven years ago. Some over-ambitious suggestions, such as the creation of a military force combining various Arab army divisions under one command, were thrown out.

Ahmed Hamroush, head of the Egyptian Committee for Solidarity, believes that the conference is only the beginning and will be followed by annual conferences bringing together the various political forces in the Arab world. "This gathering is an expression of our concern for the Arab nation located in this strategically important region of the world," Hamroush said.

He described Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu as a man "who represents a danger to peace, security and stability in the region", and said the Arab world should unite in the face of such threats.

President Hosni Mubarak, in an address read out on his behalf by Hamroush at the opening session, told the gathering that the Arab world is more than capable of a renaissance, drawing on its immense human resources. Mubarak said that in the light of the economic changes taking place in the world, the Arab states should enhance solidarity among themselves. "Egypt along with its Arab brothers is exerting great efforts to assert Arab solidarity and cooperation," Muharak said. He added that the June 1996 Arab summit in Cairo "laid down the foundations for Arab solidarity once again", and that Egypt gave inter-Arab economic cooperation top priority because it is the "pivot on which all forms of cooperation hinge".

Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad, also in an address read out on his behalf, told the delegates that Arab solidarity is the only way to confront the pressures and threats facing the Arab nation and jeopardising its present and future. In the address, read out by Ahmed Al-Assad, head of the Democratic Socialist Unionist Party, Assad affirmed that the only way to achieve this solidarity is by "clearing the atmosphere" between Arab countries.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat thanked the Arab nations for their support of the Palestinian cause, declaring that the conference should focus on confidence-building among Arab "brothers". Speaking on behalf of Arafat, Palestine's representative at the Arab League Mohamed Sobeih said that the Arab world has been torn apart by "foreign ambitions", but now "Arab solidarity must be built on solid bases to enable our nation to confront contemporary and future challenges".

Esmat Abdel-Meguid, the secretary-general of the Arab League also sent an address to the opening ceremony, saying that Arab solidarity was at the root of all the work taking place at this regional body.

Iraq's Manal Younis, chairwoman of the General Arab Women's Federation, said that the influence of grassroots political parties in forming public opinion was more important than the official mainstream. She said that the gathered delegates are the "real expression of the consciousness of the Arab people", and that the meeting was a real reflection of Arab solidarity.

This view was shared by Diaeddin Dawoud, leader of Egypt's Democratic Nasserist Party, "the people should put pressure on the rulers to carry out their will during the decision-making process". Dawoud said that the current steps being taken by the various Arab countries to achieve peace in the Middle East were "ridiculous", and do not represent the will of the nation.

Regarding the sanctions imposed on Iraq, Libya and Sudan by the UN, Dawoud called on the Arab world to unilaterally defy such blockades and sanctions to alleviate the suffering of the peoples of these countries.

Acting to build confidence



While the EU and the US were reportedly planning new initiatives to break the deadlock in the stalled Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, Egypt pressed ahead with an effort to encourage confidence-building measures between the two sides, report Dina Ezzat and Nevine Khalil

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat held talks in Alexandria on Tuesday with President Hosni Mubarak before flying to Brussels for a conference of European Union foreign ministers, where he was expected to meet with David Levy, the Israeli foreign minister.

Nabil Shaath, one of Arafat's top negotiators, was in Cairo last Saturday for talks with Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. Shaath had held three meetings in Tel Aviv with Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, which were arranged by Egyptian Ambassador Mohamed Bassiouni and US Ambassador Martin Indyk. Shaath also met with Levy in the presence of Miguel Moratinos, the European Union's Middle East envoy.

Arafat described his meeting with Mubarak as "more than important and more than positive." He said the talks were "in response to the blessed Egyptian efforts made by President Mubarak to protect the peace process and give it a forward push, despite the complications placed by the Israeli government in all directions."

Arafat said that, during the meeting with Mubarak, an assessment was made of all the efforts that have been made so far to break the stalemate. "The aim was to ascertain whether the Israeli government is serious about the peace process or not," Arafat said.

Asked whether France was preparing a new initiative, Arafat responded: "In fact, we do not know whether there is a French initiative or a European initiative, but there is a continuing European effort, which is a continuation of the Egyptian effort, to salvage the peace process. The Palestinians welcome this European role, despite the Israeli rejection of any European effort."

Arafat said the United States has not been paying much attention recently "to the situation in the Middle East and to the peace [agreement] which we signed in the White House." He expressed hope that the United States would resume its active involvement in the peace process "on the basis of its moral, political, geographic and international responsibilities."

Arafat complained that, as a result of Israeli actions, conditions in Hebron, Bethlehem, Rafah, Nablus and Khan Yunis were moving "from bad to worse."

Ambassador Bassiouni told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview that Egypt was encouraging Israel and the Palestinians to take a series of confidence-building measures.

"The basic line of the Egyptian efforts is to remove the reasons that caused the halt in talks, particularly the settlement of Abu-Ghneim, but we believe that encouraging certain measures to be taken unilaterally by both sides would help defuse the tension and restore the missing trust," Bassiouni said.

What Bassiouni is hoping to achieve is to get the Israelis to honour earlier commitments, by allowing the Palestinians to operate an airport in Gaza and construct a harbour there and by releasing Palestinian prisoners. Parallel to this, Bassiouni believes, the Palestinians should resume security coordination with Israel and the United States.

"If you get this done, then both sides could be encouraged to work on the final status talks to seek solutions to the problems of Jerusalem, settlements, water resources and borders," Bassiouni said. However, the ambassador made the resumption of the official negotiations conditional on a halt of settlement activity in the Occupied Territories.

Bassiouni appears to have taken over from presidential adviser Osama El-Baz, who made little progress in shuttle trips between Israel and the self-rule territories.

"Today, there are reciprocal promises," said Bassiouni. "But promises are not enough, and this is where we are now."

For his part, Shaath said that delivery on promises regarding the implementation of previously-made commitments should come soon, or else confidence-building would be endangered. He added that he did not feel strongly optimistic.

"It is like this: either we really come up with results on the ground, so that the Palestinians can feel free to move between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the airplanes can land in Gaza International Airport and the prisoners are released, or this process is going to suffer and confidence is going to deteriorate," he said.

Both Bassiouni and Shaath said the current situation cannot last much longer. "We cannot keep on doing this endlessly," said Bassiouni. Shaath said that it will be "a matter of days or maybe a few weeks, but not longer."

Responding to reports that the European Union and the United States are preparing new initiatives, Foreign Minister Moussa said: "There are no initiatives so far, but we all need the contribution of the sponsor of the peace process, that is the United States. And we also need the European role and the Russian contribution."

Moussa also welcomed the decision of the European foreign ministers to address the stalled peace process at their Brussels meeting, expressing hope they would come up with a formula for a "win-win situation."

'Fruitful' dialogue, but no FTA

Two Egyptian delegations visited Washington this month to promote ties with the United States and "clear misunderstandings". Gamal Essam El-Din reports on the results



Sorour



Abdellah



Guweili



El-Gharib

A People's Assembly delegation, led by Speaker Fathi Sorour, visited Washington this month with the aim of explaining Egyptian policies to US Congressmen and correcting misunderstandings that could harm bilateral relations. Another economic delegation was also in the US capital to explore the possibility of establishing a free trade area (FTA) between the two countries.

The parliamentarians hailed their trip as a success, but the economists were confronted by a series of American demands that had to be met before the FTA could become reality.

The visit of the Egyptian MPs followed a Congressional resolution to move the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. It also came after a Senate subcommittee resolution — later reversed — to cut $2.1 billion in aid to Egypt.

The People's Assembly delegation was invited to Washington by Newt Gingrich, speaker of the House of Representatives. In addition to Sorour, the group included Khaled Mohieddin, leader of the leftist Tagammu Party, Mohamed Abdellah, chairman of the Assembly's Foreign Relations committee, and Mohamed Tolba Eweida, chairman of the Assembly's Arab Relations Committee.

Abdellah told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the visit came at the right moment. "We know that the Zionist lobby has a strong influence in Congress," he said. "In our meetings there, we felt that the Zionist lobby, in collaboration with some Congressmen and think tanks, had managed to provide a distorted view of Middle East developments and to raise great support in Congress for Binyamin Netanyahu's government."

Abdellah said the Egyptian visitors presented Congressmen "with a new perspective on what is happening in the Middle East, particularly the role played by the Likud government in destroying the peace process and exposing the region to a new wave of terrorism. We argued that the Likud's policies will badly hurt the interests of the United States in the region."

In this connection, Abdellah went on, Sorour conveyed to Gingrich the view that the resolution to move the American Embassy to Jerusalem is likely to hamper progress in peacemaking and negatively affect the role of the US as an honest broker.

The Egyptian delegation discovered that Congressmen had been "negatively affected" by the reaction of the Egyptian press to the threat of cutting off aid, recalled Abdellah. "Sorour explained that the strong press reaction was due to the feeling that the US uses aid as a tool of political pressure," Abdellah said.

The Egyptians faced a barrage of questions from Congressmen on several thorny issues, ranging from Egyptian-Libyan relations to the alleged persecution of Copts.

"We explained to Congressmen that Egypt has large economic interests in Libya. There are over one million Egyptians working there, while Libyan investment in Egypt is as high as LE1 billion," Abdellah said. "We argued that we cannot sacrifice our relations with Libya, not only because of economic interests, but also because promoting inter-Arab relations is a major Egyptian concern."

Abdellah said the Egyptian visitors rejected the allegations that Copts face persecution, insisting that the government's policy is that all citizens are equal in rights and duties.

Both Egypt and the US agreed "that Egypt needs the US as much as the US needs Egypt and that the two countries should not lose each other. Gingrich was very understanding. He said he received a good insight into the Egyptian and Arab perspective of the peace process and promised to visit Egypt soon to continue the dialogue with the Egyptian parliamentarians and meet with President Mubarak," Abdellah reported.

While the parliamentarians felt their talks in Washington had been fruitful, the economic delegation, made up of Trade Minister Ahmed Guweili and Finance Minister Mohieddin El-Gharib, was confronted with what delegates felt was a hard-line American position.

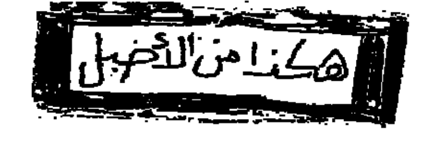
Upon his return to Cairo, Guweili told a meeting of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) the main purpose of the delegation's visit was to probe the prospects of establishing a free trade area with the United States. But the Americans, he said, set pre-conditions.

The first is that Egypt must reduce customs tariffs from the present average of 25 per cent to between 10 and 15 per cent and phase out the bureaucratic obstacles involved in customs clearance. "We indicated that the government of Egypt is always keen on making sure that there is a balance between investment returns and the decline in state revenue resulting from the reduction of custom tariffs," Guweili said, noting that the government cut customs tariffs by five per cent last week.

The second condition, he added, is the necessity of protecting patent rights of American manufacturers, particularly with regard to medicines and software. "Our response was that the government and local industry believe they have the right to enjoy the 10-year transitional period allowed by the GATT," Guweili said. But the visitors promised that a group of experts will be assembled soon to seek a solution to this problem, he added.

Other American requests, Guweili said, included the modification of the law regulating bidding procedures to make it more transparent and ensure equal opportunity for local and foreign bidders. A new law was already approved by the cabinet in April and will be put before the People's Assembly when it resumes sessions in November, he added.

To help Egypt meet the American requests, Guweili said, the Americans promised to provide Egypt with "administrative cadres" to upgrade performance in the areas of customs, harbours and taxation. "They also promised to help Egypt take advantage of the US trade preferentials system to raise the volume of exports, particularly textile exports, to the US," he said. "Further assistance will be provided in the areas of information technology, financial services and telecommunications."



Pondering UN reform

Egypt would like to see veto powers in the Security Council limited rather than expanded. **Dina Ezzat** reports on Cairo's reaction to plans to reform the UN

Ideas proposed by the United Nations and the United States to enhance the operation of the UN and expand the membership of its Security Council are officially viewed in Cairo as "potentially good". Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said the two plans were basically sound, although Cairo might disagree with some details.

According to Moussa, the plan proposed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to revamp the mechanism of operation in the international organisation was "a good framework, although we might agree or disagree with some of its details". Moussa also said that the statement made by Bill Richardson, the US representative to the UN, about expanding the membership of the Security Council was "a good beginning" and added that Egypt "might have some ideas about the number" of seats to be added to the 15-seat council.

This week, Moussa will head a meeting to discuss Annan's document with his senior aides before starting a series of consultations on the matter with his counterparts from other Third World countries, particularly those of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Last week, Annan submitted a 70-page plan to the 185 member-states of the UN, suggesting "a quiet revolution" to ensure a more efficient performance by the 50-year-old organisation. The major points in the plan are the creation of a deputy secretary-general's post, a re-working of the style and format of Annan's aides and streamlining spending. The document also deals with ways to strengthen the leadership capacity of the UN secretariat, enhancing the role of the General Assembly, reaching out for civil society, and putting a greater emphasis on disarmament, peace-keeping, human rights and economic and social development.

Annan also proposed a plan to create a revolving fund to carry the organisation through financial problems, such as the one resulting from Washington's refusal to pay its $1.2 billion debt to the UN.

With no deadline for replies to the plan, Egypt said that it will take time to examine the document carefully and will hold further consultations with NAM member states whose foreign *ministers* will meet in New York on 25 September.

According to a NAM diplomat, the main concern of the Third World countries is to have a document addressing their basic developmental needs and reducing the amount of pressure put on them by the rich and powerful states of the North. "Any reform plan that falls short of addressing these basic requirements will mean very little to the Third World countries," said the diplomat, who requested anonymity. For this to happen, there is "a need to restructure and not simply reform the UN," he added.

Almost parallel to the launching of Annan's plan, Richardson made a statement declaring Washington's readiness to add five seats to the Security Council: one for Japan, one for Germany and one for each of the African, Asian and Latin American groups. Those last three seats could be rotated among the members of these groups, if they so wished. Most, if not all, of the *newcomers* were unlikely to gain veto power.

"We actually disagree about the number of new seats to be added to the Security Council and the [right and exercise of the] veto," said Moussa. The Egyptian stance is that each continent should have two permanent member states in the Security Council, preferably with veto power. But Egypt also believes that the right to veto should be limited to matters that seriously threaten world peace and security.

Foreign ministry sources suggest that "generally speaking, Egypt feels that it is qualified to have a permanent seat in the Security Council".

Militants remain divided over cease-fire appeals

Jailed leaders of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya are using the military trial of rank-and-file members as a platform to appeal for an end to militant violence. *But is the new moderate stand genuine?* **Khaled Dawoud** investigates


photo: Nour Sobeih
Some of the 98 militants who stand accused during this week's military tribunal

Suspected members of Egypt's largest militant organisation, Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, are using their military trial, which opened earlier this month, as a platform to announce what they claim are changes in the group's strategy. However, Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi has shrugged off the defendants' appeal for an end to violence as a militant ploy.

At the opening session, one of the 98 defendants read out what he said was an appeal from his jailed leaders to stop anti-government attacks. The same defendant announced last Saturday that the leaders also oppose the killing of Coptic Christians. He then renewed the appeal to Al-Gama'a and Jihad followers to halt anti-government attacks and praised last week's release of Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front leader Abbassi Madani.

"It is not permitted to attack Christians simply because they belong to a different religion. Islam forbids injustice and aggression," said Mohamed Abdel-Alim, one of the 98 militants on trial for carrying out a series of anti-government attacks in 1994.

Abdel-Alim said the ban on attacking Christians had been imposed by leaders of Al-Gama'a and Jihad who are serving prison sentences for their roles in the 1981 assassination of President Anwar El-Sadat. They include Aboud El-Zomor, mastermind of the assassination plot, Karam Zohdi, Fouad El-Dawalibi, Hamdi Abdel-Rahman and Ali El-Sherif.

"We are making this declaration to block the road of those who want to create more trouble between the authorities and the Islamist movement," he said.

Abdel-Alim is currently held in Cairo's Tora prison, where he is serving a 15-year sentence for killing a policeman. Al-Gama'a and Jihad leaders have been held in the same prison for the past 16 years.

The jailed leaders manage to stay in touch with their followers by passing messages through visitors and Islamist lawyers. Militants are said to have great respect for their jailed leaders, but the appeal for an end to anti-government violence has apparently triggered divisions within Al-Gama'a ranks. Two statements were issued last week by expatriate leaders opposing an unconditional cease-fire. They said the government should first apply Islamic law, release thousands of detained Al-Gama'a members and stop putting militants on military trial before a cease-fire could be considered. They also suggested that the cease-fire call may have been issued as a result of police coercion.

This was denied, however, by Abdel-Alim in the statement he read out on Saturday. He also rejected minister El-Alfi's description of the appeal as a ploy by the militants to influence the course of the military trial. Abdel-Alim responded that militants had been tried in military courts for nearly five years, but that this was the first time the jailed leaders had called for a unilateral ceasefire.

Al-Gama'a has claimed responsibility for the killing of many Coptic Christians in southern Egypt over the past five years as part of its terror campaign to overthrow the government and establish an Islamic state.

In February, suspected members of Al-Gama'a raided a church in the governorate of Al-Minya and killed nine people attending a youth meeting. A month later, militants attacked a predominantly-Coptic village and killed 12 people at random.

Abdel-Alim, hailing the release of Algeria's Madani, urged all Arab governments to do likewise with other imprisoned members of militant groups.

Hearings in the trial, the largest ever in terms of the number of militants charged in a single case, have now been adjourned until Saturday.

Militants kill six policemen in Minya

TWO and a half weeks after the jailed leaders of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya issued a cease-fire call, militants in the southern city of El-Minya sprayed a police car with gunfire, killing a police lieutenant and five other policemen, reports **Ahmed Moussa**. Two passers-by were also wounded in the attack, which took place on Tuesday afternoon.

The gunmen, who were driving a stolen car, escaped and a police search was launched to track them down.

The drama began on Tuesday morning when Sayed Abdallah Abdel-Halim reported to the Abu Qurqas police station that gunmen had stolen his car after threatening him. The police station relayed a description of the stolen vehicle to all patrol cars.

Around 2pm, a police car positioned beside a bridge spotted the stolen car and gave chase. The gunmen inside the car opened fire, killing police Lt. Maged Farouk Mehanna and five other policemen. Two pedestrians were wounded and were reported to be in serious condition in hospital.

The terrorist attack was the biggest since March, when a group of militants raided a church in Abu Qurqas, killing 12 people.

Security sources blamed the latest attack on Al-Gama'a activists, vowing that the security forces would continue to pursue militants and raid their hideouts until the phenomenon of terrorism had been wiped out.

The sources noted that the attack was in flagrant contradiction to the call for "an end to violence" issued by a group of jailed Al-Gama'a leaders. The call was made on their behalf by one of 97 militants standing trial before a military court for a series of attacks in Suez City.

Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi had dismissed the cease-fire call as a ploy by the militants to influence the trial.

Judge sets deadline for spy case

The state security court trying suspected Israeli spy Azam Azam gave his spirited lawyer a one-month deadline to wrap up his presentation before it hands down a verdict. **Khaled Dawoud** attended the hearing


photo: Khaled El-Fiqi
El-Deeb (r) speaks to his client Azam in court

The courtroom where Azam Azam, an Israeli national of Druze origin, has been standing trial along with an Egyptian, Emad Ismail, in the Bab El-Khalq district near Fatimid Cairo was exceptionally packed last Saturday with Egyptian, Israeli and other journalists and television crews who were expecting a verdict.

After lengthy, hectic and sometimes tense sessions in which Azam's defence attorney, Farid El-Deeb, showered the court with requests and memos, the lawyer was due to conclude his presentation on that day. The court was expected to pass judgment afterwards on the four defendants. Besides Azam and Ismail, two Israeli women, also of Druze origin, are being tried in absentia for allegedly recruiting Ismail to work for the Israeli intelligence service, the Mossad, in return for sex and money.

But El-Deeb, who was criticised sharply by Egyptian colleagues for agreeing to defend Azam at a time relations between Egypt and Israel had reached their lowest point in years, turned his presentation into what some observers described as an exercise in theatrics.

He first gave a historic summary of how Jews were treated as equals by Muslims since the 7th century. He also reviewed how the Egyptian judiciary dealt fairly with similar spying cases in the 1950s and 60s although Egypt and Israel were in a state of war at the time. When he finally reached the 90s, he concluded that his client's case was "political", reflecting the government's desire to halt the normalisation process with Israel to show anger at the hardline policies of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

He even appealed to Netanyahu to soften his position in the stalled negotiations with the Palestinians so that the trial could be held in a better atmosphere. "I appeal in the name of the Israeli defendant to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to give up his hardline policies, fanaticism and the violation of agreements [with the Palestinians] and to allow the peace process to continue in order to improve the atmosphere of this trial," he said.

El-Deeb alleged that the government, by putting Azam and the other defendants on trial, issued an indirect warning to Egyptians against seeking work opportunities in Israel because this could turn them into spy suspects.

Azam, before his arrest outside a Cairo hotel in November, worked as a technician in a joint Egyptian-Israeli textile factory, one of the few fields of economic cooperation between the two countries since the signing of their *1979* peace treaty. The factory opened in the days of the former Israeli Labour government of Prime Minister Shimon Peres amid hopes of promoting trade ties between the two countries, El-Deeb said. But everything changed after Netanyahu came to power, he added.

El-Deeb then assailed the prosecutor and Egyptian intelligence, alleging that they did not prepare a "strong case" because the major part of the evidence *against the defendants was* "weak". The most important piece of evidence is women's underwear which prosecutors said Azam handed to Ismail. The underwear, when washed, produces invisible ink which Ismail allegedly used, or planned to use, in sending secret messages to the Mossad.

After a two-hour presentation, in which *El-Deeb said he had not addressed* the case itself yet but was only making a few points, he asked Chief Judge Moharram Darwish to adjourn hearings until Sunday as he was not feeling well because of heart problems.

On Sunday, and to the surprise of everyone, El-Deeb did not show up. One of his assistants told the court that he had suffered a minor heart attack and was seeking another postponement of 48 hours.

The seasoned El-Deeb knew well that according to the *Egyptian judicial* system, Darwish only holds hearings on a number of days each month, and that Sunday was the last day of his July hearings. Thus, the case would have to be postponed until August.

The judge and the state prosecutor, Hesham Hammouda, were apparently angered by El-Deeb's absence. Darwish asked Azam whether he wanted to retain his lawyer. When Azam responded from behind bars that he was committed to El-Deeb, *the judge warned him that this* would be the last time he adjourns the case. The next session will now be held on 17 August.

Prosecutor Hammouda, meanwhile, said that he was sick and tired of El-Deeb's "deliberate attempts to delay a verdict." He added that El-Deeb requested five adjournments, "all for unnecessary reasons." The prosecutor and Ismail's lawyer, Ahmed Bakr, have already made their pleas, with El-Deeb *alone lagging behind.*

A judicial source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that El-Deeb was intentionally delaying the case in order to gain more publicity. "But this will definitely not influence the court," he said.

El-Deeb usually arrives in court with an entourage of assistants and young lawyers who either carry his briefcase and black *lawyer's robe or come just to watch how* the seasoned lawyer presents his case. In his presentations, he uses colloquial Arabic, gesticulates and sways forward and backward to drive his point home. He also told jokes, none of which seemed to amuse Judge Darwish.

Lawyers who have been following the case believe that Azam was put in a bad position after Bakr, the lawyer of the Egyptian defendant, indirectly confirmed in his presentation last month that Ismail *was approached by the Mossad.* And yet Bakr asked the court to pardon Ismail because he informed the Egyptian intelligence service of his suspicions as well as the type of information which the Mossad agents *requested* from him. Prosecutors insisted, however, that before Ismail alerted Egyptian intelligence, he accepted money from the Mossad in return for the information he provided.

Thus, lawyers concluded, El-Deeb now will have to clear both Ismail and Azam *and prove that neither of them had any* dealings with the Mossad.

Netanyahu taken to court

In a show of anger over the desecration of Islamic and Christian symbols, three lawyers are taking Binyamin Netanyahu to court. **Gihan Shahine** reports

Three lawyers — two Muslims and a Christian — have filed lawsuits against Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, holding him responsible for drawings that insult the Prophet Mohamed and the Virgin Mary. The lawsuits have only moral value — they appear to be the lawyers' way of giving vent to their anger and frustration. Even if they win, there is no way the Egyptian courts' decisions can be enforced in Israel. Netanyahu had himself condemned the posters depicting the Prophet Mohamed as a pig, which were distributed by Tatyana Suskind, an Israeli settler now facing trial.

The lawsuits were filed by Mustafa Ashoub, Mustafa Rasslan and Mamdouh Nakhla — the latter a Christian.

Ashoub is demanding as compensation the staggering amount of $10 billion to be spent on building mosques and churches and also on helping the families of the Palestinian "Intifada martyrs." Nakhla is demanding LE1 million, but has not decided how the money should be spent.

"I felt deeply humiliated seeing the Prophet Mohamed depicted as a pig, with a hoof writing in an open book labelled the Qur'an and also when, two days later, five copies of the Qur'an were torn to pieces in a Hebron school," said Ashoub. "I was similarly hurt to see the Virgin Mary depicted with the head of a cow. I had to express my anger somehow, and filing a lawsuit is a legal and peaceful way of doing this."

Ashoub said he believes that the "desecration of Islamic and Christian symbols is part of a broader policy set by Netanyahu and other hard-liners."

The three lawyers are basing their cases on Article 163 of the Civil Code, which stipulates that anyone who causes harm to another must pay him compensation. The three argue that the acts of desecration have inflicted "definite harm" on both Muslims and Christians. Accordingly, they believe they can win their cases easily.

But Nakhla admitted that it was unlikely that he would get any money from the Israeli government. But, he added, it would be a great victory for him and for all Muslims and Christians if he won the case. "At least, this will teach the Israelis a lesson, that the Arabs should not be taken lightly," he said.

Foundering flats

Thousands of apartment blocks reportedly face the danger of collapse as a result of poor maintenance. **Gihan Shahine** reports that the Housing Ministry is preparing new legislation to deal with the problem

Poor maintenance work, which causes problems such as leaking water, has reportedly brought old apartment blocks housing several million flats to the verge of collapse. The reason is that the landlords, whose income from leasing the apartments is very limited, usually refuse to pay for repairs. Under the existing law, one third of the repair costs should be paid by the landlord and the remaining two thirds by tenants.

To deal with the problem, the Ministry of Housing is preparing new legislation that would make tenants solely responsible for paying repair costs.

Borrowing a leaf from regulations that govern condominium buildings, the new legislation would make it mandatory for the tenants of every block, that includes 10 apartments or more, to establish a tenants' union. Each tenant would pay a fee that would go into a special fund, allocated for financing the necessary repairs.

The draft bill is expected to reach the People's Assembly after it returns from its current summer recess in November. Once it takes effect, *the law empowers the chief of* the tenants' union to take legal action against tenants who refuse to pay. A defaulting tenant may even face the threat of eviction.

The maintenance fees each tenant must pay are still the subject of debate. According to Zaki Hawass, a professor of construction engineering and a member of a consultative committee at the Ministry of Housing, the issue "triggered a heated debate among ministry experts. Some suggested that the total *amount to be paid by the tenants annually* should be equal to three per cent of the building's value," he said. "But this amount, in my belief, is inadequate. I suggested six per cent of the building's value."

The share of each tenant, he suggested, will depend on the size of his apartment or the number of rooms it includes.

The People's Assembly is also working on a similar draft law, said Mohamed Ali Hassan, head of the Assembly's housing committee, but it is part of a larger housing law. *This law also empowers the head of the tenants'* union to collect money from tenants and spend it on maintenance work, he said.

In the aftermath of the October 1992 earthquake, a group of experts inspected a large number of buildings nationwide. "To our shock, we discovered that most of the cracks that appeared on walls were caused by maintenance problems, and not by the tremor itself," said Saafan Abdel-Gawad, a professor of construction engineering at Ain Shams *University*.

Experts insist that maintenance problems, mainly water and sewage leakage, could cause a building to collapse. Abdel-Gawad explains that water leakage could cause beam rust which could lead to beam cracks in no more than 10 years. Again, leakage from sewage pipes below the building could cause underground water to accumulate, thus threatening the foundations of the structure.

The lack of maintenance resulted from loopholes in the current legislation. Hassan *explained that the existing housing law stipulates* that the landlord pays for one third of the maintenance cost and tenants pay for the rest. The law, however, does not specify the responsibility of each side, thus creating problems between them. The end result is that maintenance is rarely done.

The new legislation will place the financial responsibility on the tenants' shoulders. "Tenants of old buildings pay very small rents. The landlord of an old building may get no more than LE200 a year, *while fixing a sewage pipe* may cost LE1,500," Hassan explained.

Abdel-Gawad, however, is not so sure that new law will yield results. It would be better, he said, to increase public awareness of the dangers of maintenance problems, using the mass media to this end.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Has Netanyahu pushed Arafat too far?

No sooner had "peace" been restored to Hebron streets than another crisis flared in the increasingly tense relations between Israel and the PA. Graham Usher reports from Jerusalem

As with the Hebron protests, the latest stand-off centres on the very foundation of the Oslo Accords — the question of cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority's (PA) military forces in the Palestinian self rule areas.

On 14 July, three Palestinian police officers were arrested by the Israeli army and intelligence personnel on the outskirts of Nablus. The army charged that the officers were on their way to attack the nearby Jewish settlement of Har Bracha. Two days later, the army picked up a fourth police officer, Munir Al-Abushi, on suspicion of planning additional attacks on Israeli targets in the Tulkarm area.

At a meeting on 16 July, Israel's defence minister, Yitzak Mordechai, told Palestinian negotiator Nabil Shaath that Israel's discovery of "a terror cell" within the ranks of the Palestinian police constituted the "gravest event since the Oslo Accords". Mordechai also demanded the PA extradite the PA's Head of Criminal Investigations Unit in Nablus, Jihad Masini, into Israeli custody, for ordering an armed attack on a Jewish settler on 10 July. The latest twist came on 19 July with a report on Israeli radio which quoted authoritative sources as saying that the mastermind behind the attacks was Ghazi Jabali, the head of the Palestinian police in the West Bank and Gaza.

PA responses to these accusations have taken the form of defensive denial. On 16 July, Masini refuted all charges against him, claiming they were Israel's "revenge" for his unit's discovery of four Palestinian collaborators who had infiltrated the Nablus police force at the behest of Israel's Shin Bet intelligence service. Jabali, too, shrugged off the charges as so much Israeli propaganda. "It's nonsense," he told Israel's Channel 1 TV station on 19 July. "We are working in cooperation with the Israeli police, and the arrest of the Palestinian policemen is a mistake."

Yasser Arafat, however, took the allegations more seriously. Following a secret meeting with Shin Bet chief Ami Ayalon in Gaza on 17 July (and under pressure from the US State Department, which counselled the Palestinian leader to treat Israel's charges "with the highest degree of seriousness"), Arafat vowed to open an inquiry to look into the affair.

Three days later — and on direct orders from Arafat — four Palestinian police officers, including Masini, were detained by the PA's Preventive Security Force (PSF) in Nablus to "look into" the Israeli allegations against them. Calling for US intervention in the dispute, the PSF's West Bank deputy commander, Samah Kanaan, said the "correct way" to proceed with the matter would be for "the three sides to investigate all the facts and take into account each side's complaints." As a start, Kanaan called on Israel to return the four arrested officers into Palestinian custody.

These events have left Palestinian observers scratching their heads. PA sources say the whole affair is a classic case of Israeli disinformation, aimed at deflecting international attention from the impasse regarding the Oslo peace accords, particularly after the mauling Israel's settlement policies received from the UN General Assembly on 15 July. But other commentators suggest, should Israel's accusations have any substance, that this is evidence of Arafat's weakening leadership among his own people.

Recent polls show Palestinian support for the Oslo Accords at an all-time low, with "strong support" for the Oslo Accords now at only eight per cent compared to nearly 20 per cent six months ago. Opposition to Oslo — over the same period — has increased from 19 to 30 per cent. The same poll also shows a decline in support for Arafat's "performance", down from 67 per cent two months ago to 60 per cent currently.

This crisis of legitimacy is reflected in Palestinian political society, and not only among the Islamist and PLO opposition to Oslo. Prior to Shaath's meeting with Mordechai, there were reportedly furious arguments within the Palestinian negotiating team, with some members insisting that any official contact with Israel violated a PLO executive decision not to resume negotiations until and unless Israel halts its settlement policies. As for Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, "There are some... calling for a return to armed struggle," admits West Bank Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti. "It is not yet a majority view, but there are voices and we cannot ignore them."

Fatah is the largest PLO faction and, historically, pro-Oslo. It is also the movement that supplies the bulk of the personnel that staff the PA's security forces. Should — as the Israelis allege — elements of these forces seek less "cooperation" with Israel than war against its settlements, it would spell not just the demise of Oslo. It would also signal the end of Yasser Arafat — which is one reason he is taking Israel and the US's warnings seriously.

UNRWA sounds the alarm

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) has recently issued a special emergency appeal in order to provide $11 million urgently needed by 350,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. UNRWA's director Peter Hensen talked to Mustafa Abdallah in Vienna about the difficulties facing the organisation

What are the effects of the deterioration of the peace process on the work of the UNRWA?
The UNRWA is a humanitarian organisation whose mandate is to provide education, health, relief and social services to 3.4 million registered Palestinian refugees living in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Thus, the UNRWA is not directly involved in the peace process.

While we are trying to maintain the regular service programmes for the refugees and do our part in fulfilling the UN's commitment toward the peace process, we also are concerned over the difficulties confronting the peace process which could affect the UNRWA's ability to do more, not only in improving living conditions, but also in sustaining development for the Palestinian people.

To what extent are the Israeli authorities cooperating with the UNRWA?
We maintain regular contacts with the Israeli authorities. Difficulties arise on certain occasions, particularly regarding the movement of Agency staff and supplies between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

We have taken up these issues a number of times with the Israeli authorities. We are sometimes satisfied with their responses, but a number of issues which relate to the Agency's privileges and immunities as an organ of the United Nations have yet to be resolved.

Since you have been in the Palestinian areas for sometime, how do you envision the future of the Palestinian people in the light of the deteriorating economic situation?
When we talk about the future of the Palestinian people, we should always remember that Palestinians in the self-rule areas are only one part of the entire Palestinian people.

I fully agree with you that the Palestinians living in the self-rule areas are suffering from a very difficult economic situation. There are import and export problems as well as extra customs and handling charges on commodities resulting in higher prices that are ultimately borne by the consumers.

There is a lack of substantial investment. Unemployment rates have reached unacceptably high levels, especially in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. Lack of cash flow has resulted in economic stagnation. Per capita income in Gaza and the West Bank has fallen an estimated 40 per cent since 1992.

On top of this, there is a serious feeling of frustration among the people arising out of their inability to exercise a reasonable degree of movement, especially when Israel tightens restrictions on movement. All these difficulties have an immediate impact on Palestinian refugees and are thus of concern to the UNRWA.

In addition to these problems, over 350,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon face serious socio-economic problems. They depend almost entirely on the UNRWA for basic education, health and social services. Their inability to access the job market, to avail themselves of public health facilities and a worsening economic situation generally, has heightened their desperation and misery.

The UNRWA's General Fund resources are insufficient to cope with the growing needs of this refugee population. Having said this, it is my feeling that unless a political solution is reached within the context of the peace process, I am afraid that the current problems would only increase the frustrations of the Palestinians.

Where do you stand on the UNRWA's chronic financial problem? What was the outcome of your last meeting in Amman?
UNRWA's annual regular cash budget for 1997, covering our three main programmes in education, health, relief and social services amounts to $312 million. Ninety five per cent of the Agency's income is in the form of voluntary contributions from donor countries. Since 1993, UNRWA has experienced serious shortfalls in funding for its regular programmes. Our reserves have been exhausted. UNRWA is able to continue operating, but our ability to do so without major disruption is decreasing as time goes on.

Apart from the other budget deficit factors, such as static contribution levels and inflation, the growth in the refugee population has been another key factor to create additional demands on UNRWA's services. The registered refugee population has grown from about 800.000 refugees in 1950 (when UNRWA began its operations) to 3.4 million refugees today. This means that more children enter Agency schools each year and more people are treated at UNRWA's health centres and clinics.

During our meeting last month in Amman with major donor and host government representatives, we urged donors to re-examine positively their contributions with a view to ensuring the continued provision of essential services to the refugees at existing levels.

What are your options if you do not receive sufficient funds to sustain your programmes at their current levels?
We have already implemented many rounds of austerity measures to help in decreasing the budget deficit. We have cut down further on administrative costs and the number of posts in UNRWA's staff.

The logical consequence of not receiving adequate funds in order to maintain the regular programmes at their current levels combined with the growth in the refugee population and the increasing demand on UNRWA's services is to consider cutting part of the services which are already at minimum levels. But, if we did this, we would place the refugees who are most in need of these services in an intolerable situation. Any further cuts in the services would send the signal to the refugees that the international community is abandoning its commitment to the Palestinian refugee problem. Therefore, we are determined to do everything in our power not to undertake further cuts in the services.

We are also pursuing a three-pronged strategy to increase our income and to broaden our donor base. First, we are encouraging existing donor countries to increase their contributions. Second, we are looking to attract new donors to join the international community's support for the UNRWA. Third, we are taking a number of initiatives to develop cooperation with new types of donors, including the private sector and wealthy individuals.


photo: Reuters

On Sunday, around 1000 Muslim students shouted anti-Israeli slogans at the Jordanian university in Amman as they marched in support of Dakamseh

Relief as Dakamseh gets life

The life sentence meted out to the Jordanian soldier who killed seven Israeli schoolgirls in March was received with mixed feelings in Jordan and Israel, reports Lola Keilani from Amman

For the first time in Jordan's history a "women only" demonstration of 500 marched along the streets of the northern city of Irbid on Sunday, waving black flags, wearing white head scarves and chanting support for Ahmed Dakamseh, the Jordanian soldier who shot and killed seven Israeli schoolgirls last March while they were visiting the Jordanian-Israeli border area of El-Baqoura, where he was posted.

The military court's ruling Saturday sentencing Dakamseh to life imprisonment was received with feelings of relief by some and anger by others. The verdict was acceptable to most parties because it accommodated Israeli pressures while satisfying many Jordanians who did not want Dakamseh to be executed by a military squad.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's adviser, David Bar-Ilan, expressed satisfaction with the verdict and said that "the conduct of the Jordanian government throughout this horrible incident has been exemplary and the verdict is eminently justified."

For his part, former Jordanian Prime Minister Ahmed Obeidat described the verdict as an "intelligent political decision." It was welcomed by the Jordanian public and did not come as a surprise to politicians and independent analysts. According to the latter, the verdict matches the sentence which Israeli courts would have given to any of their citizens committing a similar act.

Toujan Faisal, a member of the Jordanian parliament and an opposition figure, said that "it was a political trial and I expected such a sentence." She added that "it would have aggravated the anger of the Jordanian people if the sentence had been death."

The Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political wing of Jordan's influential Muslim Brotherhood, also welcomed the verdict even though they had hoped that Dakamseh would get a lighter sentence.

Nayel Zeydan, a member of the IAF executive council, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "Such a reaction is normal with all the atrocities committed against the Arabs in the West Bank compared to the good treatment which the Israeli soldier Noam Friedman received." Friedman is the soldier who opened fire on Arab civilians last year in Hebron. An Israeli court released Friedman on grounds that he was mentally sick.

The Jordanian military court's decision "has saved the country from a national crisis because execution would have incited citizens to violence," Zeydan said. Nevertheless, opposition political parties, including the IAF, described the verdict as harsh and stressed that Israelis committing similar crimes against Arabs usually receive verdicts "full of mercy."

"The soldier should have been treated the same way Israel treats its soldiers when they shoot Arabs," said lawyer Ahmed Nigdawi, one of the Arab Baath Party leaders in Jordan, who withdrew from the Dakamseh case in protest against the court's decision to summon Israeli witnesses. He saw this as a form of "normalisation with the enemy" which he rejected.

The five-member military court found Dakamseh not guilty of premeditated murder but convicted him of manslaughter. It spared his life because of his mental state at the time. The court further stated that Dakamseh suffers from a mental disorder that made him unable to control himself and prevented him from realising the consequences of his actions.

The two psychiatrists who were summoned by the court to evaluate the mental state of Dakamseh testified that, at the time he shot the schoolgirls, the soldier suffered from an anti-social mental disorder that mitigates his guilt. Four other psychiatrists who were summoned earlier by the public prosecutor gave conflicting testimonies on Dakamseh's mental state.

The 27-year-old Dakamseh said that he was provoked by the girls' mockery and loud laughter when they saw him praying.

Obeidat, who was a member of the defence panel that included 120 lawyers, told the *Weekly* that he had expected the sentence to be reduced "because the court dropped the charges of premeditated murder." He added that the "court did not take into account the anti-social mental disorder from which the corporal suffered. This could have reduced his sentence to 10 years imprisonment."

Reacting to the verdict, Leith Shbeilat, president of the Jordan Engineers' Association and member of the "Jordanian Popular Committee for the Defence of the soldier Ahmed Dakamseh", warned that "there are no guarantees that Dakamseh will not face real danger in jail." Shbeilat's fear is shared by a number of opposition parties who hope and intend to work on easing the verdict.

"The Muslim Brotherhood will work on changing the verdict," said Zeydan. Faisal also said that "eventually, we will work on getting Dakamseh acquitted."

According to Jordanian law, military court verdicts cannot be appealed in court. King Hussein is constitutionally the only authority able to reduce or mitigate the sentence upon a recommendation from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

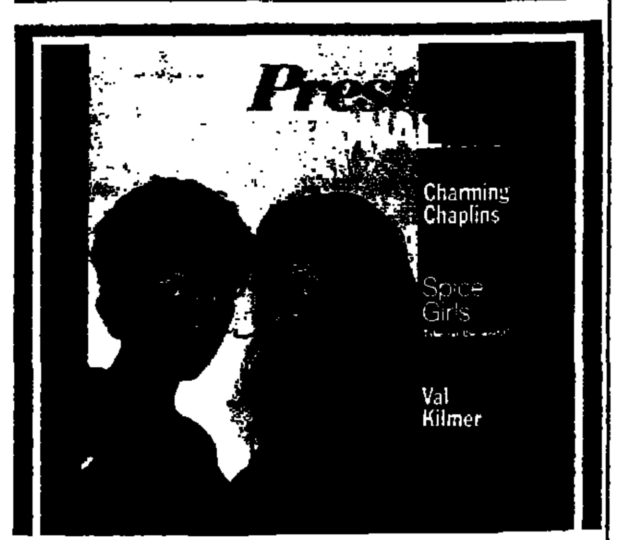
But the mothers of the seven Israeli girls who were killed in the incident were not happy with the verdict. They sent a letter to King Hussein saying that Dakamseh deserved to die and that a life sentence was lenient

Reviving the 'Switzerland of the Middle East'

After seven years of intesive re-construction, Lebanon feels set to regain its reputation as the Middle East's Switzerland. Zeina Khodr, in Beirut, reports on a new climate of optimism

Before the war broke out in 1975, Lebanon generated millions of dollars from its tourism industry. Tourism brought in almost 22 per cent of the GNP, and the country was known for being the gateway between the "East and West".

Today, the country is slowly regaining its past reputation.



"The government is working to rebuild the country's image and its infrastructure," Nasser Safieddine, adviser to the minister of tourism, said. "Due to the war, Lebanon became known to the world as a place that was not safe. So, our first priority is to show the world that this country is a safe place and it has a lot to offer its visitors."

The ministry is not only promoting Lebanon as the destination for sun and sea, but is also placing special emphasis on the country's cultural heritage.

Tourist attractions and ancient archaeological sites are being restored. Two years ago, Lebanon reopened the caves of Jeita, a vast series of floodlit caverns that were one of the country's most spectacular tourist attractions before the war. The caves stretch hundreds of metres into a mountainside. It is now also a common sight to see busloads of foreign tourists visiting the temples of Baalbeck and the Crusader castles in Jbeil and Tripoli.

"I never thought Lebanon would be like this. It has so much history. The destruction caused by the war is also very interesting to see," said June Adamson, a 50-year-old Canadian tourist, while touring the Crusader castle in Jbeil. "We have good friends in Lebanon but when they told us to come and visit them, my husband and I hesitated. All we knew about this country was through the media. And Beirut used to make headlines during the war."

Last year, 420,000 tourists visited the country compared to 410,000 in 1995. "According to a survey by the International Tourism Organisation, revenue from tourism in 1996 reached $715 million and we expect a larger figure this year," Minister of Tourism Nicolas Fattouche said when he opened the renovated arrival lounge at the Beirut International Airport and launched the summer season's tourism drive earlier this month.

To kick off the summer season, the ministry organised "The Arab Tourism Festival" which runs from this month until September.

"This whole summer will be a festival. Lebanon will be hosting a series of concerts and performances... The whole country is enjoying cultural activities and we have high expectations." Tourism Ministry adviser Safieddine said. "We organised the Arab festival since most of our tourists come from the Arab world."

The Baalbeck festival, once the country's leading cultural event, also returns this summer for the first time in 22 years. It was held annually amid the spectacular Roman ruins from 1956 to 1974 with well-known performers taking part until the war broke out. This year cellist Mstislav Rostropovich will perform on the steps of the Roman temple of Bacchus inside the Baalbeck Acropolis.

International performers such as opera diva Montserrat Caballe and the Cairo Philharmonic orchestra will be playing in the Beiteddine cultural festival.

"The festival is set to be an event of international calibre. Each night will be special and rich in culture," Nora Jumblatt, the festival committee's president, said. "This event, like other festivals in this country, could help Lebanon regain its position as a centre of culture, music and arts."

Also, earlier this month, legendary singer Shirley Bassey made her first public appearance in Beirut in 30 years. Julio Inglesias is also scheduled to perform in the Beirut Forum this summer. "The fact that two megastars are giving concerts in Beirut should bring people to the country," one of the organisers said.

While working to preserve the country's cultural heritage, Lebanon is also trying to capitalise on the return of thousands of young Lebanese largely educated in the West. As a manifestation of growing confidence in Lebanon's economy, international restaurant chains and nightclubs are back in Beirut.

Familiar names such as the Lone Star Café, Henry J. Beans, Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Baskin-Robbins and Planet Hollywood have opened their doors within the past three years and are nightly crammed with youngsters. One of the latest arrivals is the Hard Rock Café, the first in the Middle East.

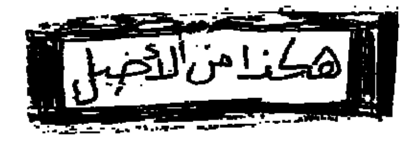
The Casino du Liban, a symbol of Lebanon's pre-war heyday, also reopened last year. The region's most prestigious gambling casino is itself gambling on luring the international jet set once again.

Local television stations, meanwhile, are doing their best to promote tourism and send out a different image of the previously war-torn country.

But Israel's occupation of south Lebanon and the deadlock in the Middle East peace process are still sources of instability. Until a regional settlement is reached, the tourism industry in Lebanon will not be able to realise its full potential.

Lebanese officials are also working hard to persuade the US government to lift the ban on American citizens travelling to Lebanon. This would not only increase tourism revenues, but, more important, would be a certificate from the world's superpower that Lebanon is now a "safe place."

Lebanese opposition parties, trade unions and residents of poor rural areas in the south, meanwhile, are sharply critical of the government's tourism drive and resent increased spending on tourism, while stark poverty and deteriorating living conditions are ignored.





Madani declines 'blood wedding'

Abbassi Madani, the recently released Islamic Salvation Front leader, tells Amira Howeidy in a telephone interview, that Algeria, and not the FIS, is his prime concern

The 66-year-old leader of Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front, Abbassi Madani, agreed to give an interview to Al-Ahram Weekly on condition that it be "very brief". Earlier in the week, Algeria's Interior Ministry warned Madani that he should avoid talking to the press or making political statements, in accordance with the conditions for his release. He spoke from his parents' home in Belcourt, central Algiers.

You have repeatedly stated that your release was unconditional and that there was no deal behind it, yet the Interior Ministry announced a few days ago a number of conditions governing your release and depriving you of your civic rights. What is your legal position exactly?
I do not think about this matter. All I think about now is developing a means to get Algeria out of [the crisis] it is in. This is what is important to me. And I ask God to give me peace of mind and aid me.

How do you propose to achieve this goal?
How? I have not decided yet. And even if I did, I will not reveal my plans. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said it is wisest not to pre-empt our actions by talking about them.

If the future of Algeria is not conceptualised with enough sensibility, we will be faced with a dangerous situation. And in a world full of conspiracies, we will not be left with any hope.

Why hasn't your deputy, Sheikh Ali Belhaj, been released?
This question should be addressed to the authorities.

But what is your personal interpretation of his situation?
I have absolutely no information [on this]. And I cannot interpret what I am ignorant of. When scientists interpret something, this happens after they get to know what it is first.

Upon your release, you were quoted as saying that you will plant the "bombs of life" in Algeria. Does this mean that the Islamic Salvation Front's (FIS) army will reverse its militant policy to comply with your upcoming peaceful plans?
Right now, I am addressing all the Algerians, and I think that those who you mentioned will be the first to respond to that.

Rumour has it that the FIS will contest the coming municipal elections under the umbrella of a new party. Is this true?
I am not going to shop in this market. I am not after the elections. I am not seeking to wed a beautiful young woman while she is drowning in her blood.

I will not be involved in the market of buying and selling while our people are going through the situation we are all aware of.

The FIS leaders in exile have repeatedly denounced violence in Algeria. But what is your stance?
This is not my issue. My cause is not concerned with finding out who the aggressor is and who the victim is. My primary and only concern is how to get Algeria out [of its crisis].

An Algerian political party leader was quoted recently as saying that the release of the FIS leaders will shake the infrastructure of the FIS as some would interpret the release as a truce while others would see it as treachery. What is your comment?
I will not comment on this, and I don't care much about it, either.

Beside God and getting my country out of its crisis, I don't care about the FIS or anything else. I will not stoop that low.

If any party or anyone — whoever that may be — wishes to help me in my cause, he would be very welcome. If, for example, my car stops and I need someone to push it for me, will I ask him whether or not he is a member of the FIS? If he isn't, will I prevent him from helping me? Is that logical or right? How then, when we talk about saving a nation from destruction, can we stop at who is who?

What is being said about this issue is not logical, philosophical, moral or even remotely related to the science of politics as I know it. I will not trade with politics and I don't care about the political gains that could be achieved out of the situation in Algeria.

Washington puts the squeeze on Damascus

The US Congress is considering a bill that would slap a ban on trade with Syria, but the Clinton administration is opposed to the draft legislation, reports Lamis Andoni from Washington

In what is seen as an attempt to pressure Syria into accepting the Israeli terms for a peace treaty, the US Congress is considering a bill that would prohibit trade with Damascus.

US State Department Spokesman Nicholas Burns said that the President Bill Clinton's administration was opposed to the bill and has been in touch with the Syrian government to allay its fears. The administration is worried that the bill, sponsored by pro-Israeli congressmen, would undermine its efforts to salvage the peace process.

Burns told reporters Friday that Washington "did not support this draft legislation." He added that despite the difficulties facing the peace process, a differentiation had to be made between Syria, "which joined the negotiating table," and Iran, which is already on the State Department's list of countries allegedly supporting terrorism.

Arab American organisations, however, are concerned that the administration is not lobbying hard enough on Capitol Hill to block the bill. "The administration is weak as usual," said one Arab American lobbyist who wished not to be identified.

The National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA) and the Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), have asked their members to send letters to the administration urging it to do more to block the bill. "We want the administration to take a more balanced approach to the issue," said ADC head Hala Maksoud.



NAAA met with representatives of American companies who trade with Syria to coordinate efforts to stop the bill that appears to have support on Capitol Hill.

The bill will be based on legislation already passed by both houses of Congress, restricting all dealings and assistance to countries accused of "sponsoring terrorism."

The US has not removed Syria's name from the list of states sponsoring terrorism. Some pro-Israeli congressmen and several senators have been calling for pressures on Syria to stop supporting Lebanon's Hizbollah and Palestinian groups opposed to the Oslo Accords.

The two separate pieces of legislation are sponsored by Congressmen John Ascroft and Bill McCollum. But Congress is expected to act on a unified bill. The two Republicans are outspoken supporters of Israel and have in the past supported bills aimed at halting aid to the Palestinian Authority.

According to members of Arab American organisations, the State Department is opposed to a ban on financial transactions to Syria because it will undercut its efforts to get Damascus back to the negotiating table.

Section 1605 of what is called the State Department Bill prohibits all financial transactions to Syria except those relating to humanitarian assistance, transactions, journalistic endeavours, diplomatic relations and national security.

The NAAA and the ADC have issued a joint statement pointing out that the bill, if passed, will limit President Bill Clinton's manoeuvrability and obstruct and deprive the US of future markets.

Supporters of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu are said to have lobbied for the bill in order to justify Israel's rejection of a territorial compromise in the Golan and its determination to continue its intervention in Lebanon.

Syria has been accusing the Likud government of reneging on an agreement between Syrian negotiators and the former Labour government involving an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan.

The Likud government has made it clear that it has no intention of pulling out from the Golan Heights and demanded an end to Syria's support of Hizbollah.

The US administration, analysts say, is interested in putting some pressure on Syria, especially following recent signs of rapprochement between the latter and Iraq, but a trade ban on Syria could be an excessive measure and may undermine stability in the region.

Syria's official media, meanwhile, reacted angrily to the Congress's attempts to impose sanctions against Damascus. The government-owned *Tishrin* daily charged in a front page editorial that the Congress had fully adopted the "rancorous and racist" policy of Israel's Premier Netanyahu.

"This uncordial step by the Congress towards the Syrian people confirms that the Congress has become more Zionist in its dealings with Arab issues than the Israeli Knesset (parliament) itself," the editorial said. *Tishrin* added the US terrorism charge against Syria was "a silly pretext to settle Israeli accounts with Syria through the US Congress".

'You change if you like'

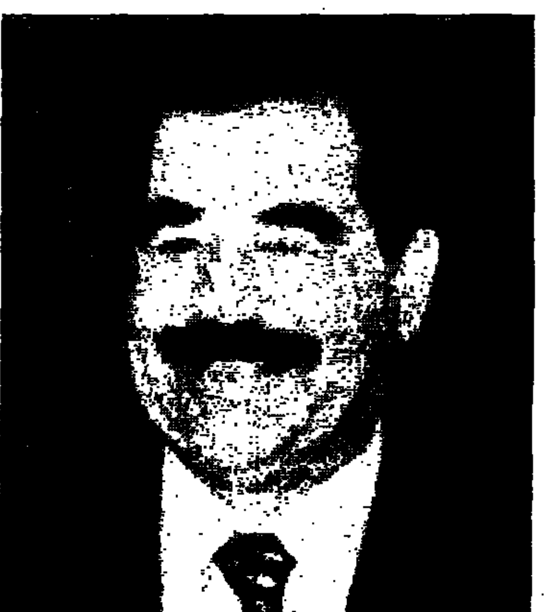
In what may have been his longest speech since coming to power 18 years ago, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein showed no intention of changing the policies which led to Baghdad's isolation, reports Hussein Al-Qassimi

"It is an important speech," the official Iraqi News Agency heralded the day before President Saddam Hussein made his annual address to the nation on the 17 July anniversary of the 1968 Baath Party coup in Iraq. For three hours, the 60-year-old Iraqi leader sat before television cameras to read out the 63-page speech which was also broadcast by Iraqi radio stations and copies of which were faxed to news organisations abroad.

It was probably Saddam's longest speech since he became president 18 years ago. The address covered every possible issue, ranging from why and how he orchestrated the coup he was celebrating, to the wars he fought against the Iranians and the Americans, and from the sanctions imposed on Iraq by the United Nations to his vision for Arab unity. Last but not least, his speech tackled the liberation of Palestine.

Analysts and observers have long raised the question of whether Saddam has changed after all these years and if there is any ray of hope that such a change will lead to an end to the Iraqi predicament. To both the optimists and the sceptics, the defiant and uncompromising speech must have been a clear answer.

In the early 1980s when the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was under fire from critics because of her economic policies, her response was simple and unwavering. "You turn if you like, the lady is not for turning." Saddam's vibrant speech conveyed exactly the same message to those who expected him to change. He vowed that his political programme would go forward.



Just weeks before the speech, reports by some of the Iraqi opposition groups in exile suggested that Saddam might embark on a programme of political reform which would eventually open up the system for independent elements to participate in government. They said he would use the 17 July speech to make a national reconciliation initiative in an effort to end the political deadlock in the country. But the high expectations appear to have been merely wishful thinking. Instead, Saddam offered a confident defence of his reign and asserted that "it is God, the nation and the people whom we try to satisfy and not the tyrants and those who are weak and vicious".

He declared that Iraq was "a revolutionary bastion which all Arabs should resort to in their fight against the weak, the defeated, the short-sighted, the shallow-minded, the unenthusiastic and unfaithful". Such a comment would no doubt raise eyebrows in other Arab countries, especially those which were waiting for a conciliatory gesture to stimulate Arab governments to end Iraq's isolation and bring it back into the Arab fold.

Nevertheless, Saddam called for Arab unity and for an Arab summit to be devoted solely to the Palestinian issue. Despite the fact that Iraq has not been invited to an Arab summit since the 1990 Gulf crisis, Saddam went as far as setting an agenda for the proposed gathering and outlined a plan for joint Arab action "to save Palestine and Jerusalem". Arab reconciliation should not be a precondition for attending the summit, no speeches should be made by the participants and no records of the meetings should be written, he said.

The conference, he added, should not come out with a final communiqué like the ones issued by previous Arab summits which he described as redundant. Meanwhile, Arabs should freeze all ties with Israel, if they cannot sever them, the Iraqi leader suggested.

For the Palestinians, Saddam had this advice: "Until Palestine is liberated, the Palestinians should avoid laying a foundation for a state which will be a heavy burden every time the Zionist entity threatens them with destruction." He added that "the so-called autonomous rule area should become a springboard for a revolutionary struggle and not a state". It remains to be seen what Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's reaction will be to such a proposal.

With his eyes on the October meeting of the UN Security Council to review the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam devoted part of his speech to Iraq's relations with the Council. He said that Iraq had fulfilled all its obligations under UN resolutions and that it was time that the crippling sanctions were lifted. Probably most significant was his call on other member states to challenge the United States in the Council, even if Washington resorted to the veto power. He was apparently expressing dissatisfaction with France, Russia and China with whom Iraq signed oil deals and expected that, in return, they would help in the efforts to get the sanctions lifted. If the experience of the last seven years is anything to go by, it is highly unlikely that the Security Council will change course in October despite Saddam's warning.

For observers of the situation in Iraq, the question remains as to whether any new development will lead to changes in Saddam's internal and foreign policies. But to those seeking changes in Iraq, the 17 July address must have had a clear message: "You change if you like".

The writer is an Iraqi journalist based in Cairo.

Al-Mahdi insists on peace with democracy

Africa's 14-year-old "forgotten war" in Sudan is far from over. The gap remains wide between the military government in Khartoum and the relatively united opposition

In an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, former Sudanese Prime Minister and leader of the Umma Party Sadeq Al-Mahdi reported on a recent meeting of the Sudanese opposition groups in Asmara, Eritrea. The consensus reached at the meeting was that the struggle against the military-led government of Sudanese President Lieutenant-General Omar Al-Bashir and his main ally Hassan Al-Turabi, leader of the Islamic National Front and Speaker of the Sudanese parliament, should be escalated.

Northern and southern Sudanese opposition parties, united under the banner of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), also agreed to disregard the so-called peace offers made recently by Al-Bashir, describing them as an attempt to fool the Sudanese people and to ease the isolation of Khartoum's government on the international, Arab and African levels.

The Asmara meeting took place while war raged in southern and eastern Sudan between the government's army troops and the opposition rebels. It also came shortly before a meeting in Nairobi of the African body known as the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), which includes Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan and Djibouti. African leaders at the meeting forced Al-Bashir to accept the principle of sitting down with the opposition and negotiating a settlement using the framework of a declaration of principles agreed upon by the two sides in 1994.

Despite an initial feeling of optimism, statements made by Al-Bashir shortly after the meeting made it clear that his understanding of the so-called "settlement" remains far from that of the opposition. In his view, the 1994 African-sponsored declaration of principles is not binding and can only be taken as a "basis for negotiations."



The response of the Sudanese opposition was also swift. Al-Mahdi told *the Weekly*: "We decided to escalate the war efforts on all fronts: military, political and diplomatic, in order to pressure the regime in Khartoum into signing a political agreement that would solve the problems on the eastern and southern fronts." Al-Mahdi's statements matched those of John Garang, leader of the Sudan's People's Liberation Army's (SPLA), whose troops bear the main responsibility for the ongoing struggle between the government and the opposition in southern Sudan.

Garang rejected Al-Bashir's call for a cease-fire in southern Sudan and insisted that a "comprehensive framework of negotiations is necessary, and indeed essential, to any cessation of hostilities." He even threatened to put Khartoum under siege should the government pursue its delaying tactics in reaching an agreement.

The SPLA, seeking self-determination for the predominantly Christian south from the Arab Muslim north, joined forces with the northern opposition under the umbrella of the NDA when it became clear that the two sides had a common interest in toppling Khartoum's government. Such unity has strengthened the Sudanese opposition and enabled it to open a new front against Khartoum in eastern Sudan along the border with Eritrea.

Al-Mahdi assured that "there will be no agreement [with Al-Bashir's government] unless it is endorsed by all opposition groups and unless it addresses two main issues: peace and democracy." He added that the two demands "cannot be divided and must be fulfilled through a constitutional framework to support and protect peace from the arbitrariness of the government."

The Sudanese government acknowledges the need for a certain degree of self-determination in the south, but, in an attempt to divide the opposition, signed an agreement in April with six southern Sudanese rebel groups which split from Garang's SPLA. The agreement with the South Sudan Defence Force (SSDF) led by Reik Machar, however, is not expected to bring peace to southern Sudan as Garang's SPLA refused to approve it.

Meanwhile, the government is trying to cause a rift within the ranks of the NDA by separating the two issues of democracy, demanded by the northern opposition, and self-determination of the south, demanded by the SPLA. "The regime in Khartoum calls for a peace agreement with the south, followed by, and in a separate initiative, a reconciliation with the opposition through limited democratic reform," Al-Mahdi observed. "We say No. Only a fool will make a peace agreement with the regime without a constitutional framework for a pluralist democracy. Neither Garang nor we will accept a separation of the two connected issues," he continued.

A Sudanese official, in recent statements, excluded the possibility of a return to the multi-party system which came to an end when Al-Bashir led a military coup in April 1989.

Despite the vocal rejection of most opposition demands by the government, some observers interpret several events as signs of the regime's weakness and predict that Al-Bashir will have to make concessions in the future. The IGAD 1994 declaration of principles, which Al-Bashir said he accepted as "a basis for negotiations", clearly advocates a separation between state and religion. This stands in total contradiction to the principles of Al-Bashir and Al-Turabi's fundamentalist government and their attempts to not only "Islamise" Sudan, but the whole of Africa.

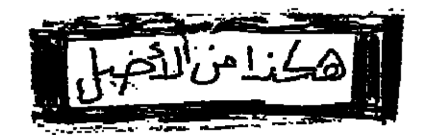
The fact that Al-Bashir was forced to sit with three African leaders whose relations with Khartoum have reached their lowest point in years — Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda — and accept their mediation, is yet another sign that the man is in trouble.

In search of support elsewhere, Al-Bashir's government has been trying to reconcile with the Arab countries it angered by its support of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein during the 1990 Gulf War and its attempts to export its fundamentalist Islamic model. For his part, Al-Mahdi does not think that these conciliatory steps will accomplish much, because Khartoum's militant Islamic ideas have already alienated most of its neighbours.

Internally, Al-Bashir is facing strong opposition by a Sudanese public suffering from rising living costs and deteriorating services. "The universities in Sudan have been closed for more than seven months and the government almost hunts down youths in the streets to prevent demonstrations like those of September 1995 and September 1996," said Al-Mahdi.

Considering the contradictory signals emanating from Sudan, it is premature to predict the outcome of the war. Al-Mahdi sees three possible scenarios: "The collapse of the regime; the eruption of a national uprising; or the realisation of the opposition's goals through a peaceful agreement that would liquidate the regime."

Reported by **Rania El-Razaz**





Cyprus President Glafcos Clerides passes by the Greek-Cypriot National Guard on his way to special church services on 20 July in Nicosia, commemorating those who died in 1974 during the Turkish invasion of Northern Cyprus. 20 July marks the 23rd anniversary of the Turkish occupation (photo: Jihan Ammar, AFP)

US wants 'bleeding hearts' out of UN

Proposals to reform the UN have been opposed by America. **Gamal Nkrumah** in New York explores why the US is at odds with the UN

Last week, in an unprecedented outburst, the normally cool and level-headed United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that "American demands were becoming offensive." Annan had just revealed a radical reform plan for the UN.

The plan proposes drastic organisational changes within the UN, aimed at reducing huge administrative costs. Over the weekend Annan's initiatives were rebuffed in Washington.

The Americans insist that United States Congressional auditors regularly scrutinise the UN's financial records and Washington stipulates mandatory consultation between the UN and Congress whenever a peace-keeping operation is proposed.

America, however, is in debt to the UN coffers to the staggering sum of $1.5 billion — yet the US Senate has said it is only prepared to give the UN a sum of $819 million, regardless of Annan's reforms. Annan, with the backing of most European powers, sees the Senate's intransigence as a smack in the face for his efforts to improve the running of the UN.

Washington is only interested in a UN that will rubber-stamp America's designs to secure its worldwide interests. Many Americans actually see the UN as a threat to American hegemony — a fly in the ointment of the post-Cold War new world order. UN meddling in development concerns in Third World countries is deemed "regrettable". Multinationals and the international financial institutions, like the Washington-based World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, are far better positioned than the UN and its many different affiliates, in American eyes, to take charge of development work.

America also wants a drastic reduction in the number of UN-sponsored conferences and insists on limiting the conference venues to New York and Geneva.

But what really lies at the root of the altercation between the UN and the US? The problem is a difference in perceptions of their respective roles in the new world order. It is not just a question of money and of America not paying its dues. The Republican-led Congress views the world with eyes that are eerily reminiscent of those of the men who carried out the witch hunts of the McCarthy era in the US itself. Soft-hearted big spenders, philanthrophists and do-gooders masquerading as bureaucrats are to be weeded out. Topping the list of offending UN-affiliated agencies are UNICEF, the UN Development Programme, and the UN Industrial Development Office. Other affiliates to be closely scrutinised include UNHCR, UNESCO, FAO and WHO. Partly bowing to pressure from America, Annan urged the UN's 185 member states to accept changes in the UN Charter and the treaties that founded these affiliate agencies. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs is to be scrapped. Still, America is not satisfied.

Today, 27 undersecretaries-general report directly to the overburdened secretary-general. If Annan gets his way and wins UN General Assembly approval for his scheme, the secretary-general will establish a new five-member UN Cabinet directed by the newly-created post of deputy secretary-general.

However, the US Congress is only concerned about ensuring that the UN compensates America to the tune of $100 million for equipment and services supplied to UN peacekeeping operations worldwide. The Europeans are enraged at what one European diplomat in New York, speaking on condition of anonymity, described to *Al-Ahram Weekly* as "US audacity and America's bloody cheek."

Bill Richardson, US ambassador to the UN, spelt out the differences in a speech he made in England last week. "Truly effective reform will depend in large part on the UN's ability to come to grips with, and adapt to, the vast transitions already under way in the international system and in particular the movement toward regional integration and cooperation," Richardson said. He sidestepped altogether the issue of UN reform, subtly implying that the reform in itself is of no significant consequence. The UN secretary-general was, after all, hand-picked by the US, ostensibly to carry out the reforms that his Egyptian predecessor, Boutros Ghali, was ill disposed to do.

What is important, Richardson insinuated, is that America's job as world overseer would much better be served by regional economic organisations such as the European Union, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, and the Middle East and North Africa economic summits in the economic arena.

And, following Europe's irritating inability to intervene militarily in Bosnia and America's own disgraceful debacle in trouble spots like Somalia, America's job as world policeman is deemed to be better served by regional military organisations like NATO in Europe and the West African peace-keeping force Ecomog in Africa. NATO was rather successful in keeping relative peace in Bosnia and Ecomog was likewise successful in stopping the civil war in Liberia — the first post-civil war elections were held in the war-torn West African country on Sunday.

Powerful regional allies, like Israel, are critically important in areas of the world where regional cooperation might be difficult such as in the Middle East. Even so, during the so-called "Gulf War" designed to cow Iraq and eliminate its military potential, a regional force of American, European and Arab troops was triumphant. The UN Security Council did not stand in Washigton's way as it did when the Soviets were in charge in Moscow during the Cold War era. The Soviets invariably vetoed American plans.

But, let us not lose sight of the fact that Annan's proposed reforms are indeed the most sweeping organisational changes in the UN's history. Administrative costs are to be slashed by 30 per cent. The elimination of over 1,000 staff posts is expected to reduce administrative costs by one-third.

In his drive to reduce the overlapping of the UN's structures and drastically cut administrative costs, Annan consolidated three economic and social departments into a single unit and established the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Two human rights agencies are to be merged into one.

The unresolved question remains: who will foot the bills and reduce the UN's large overdraft. Washington points an accusing finger at Europe and, especially, Japan. Europe currently pays 40 per cent of the UN budget. America, which currently contributes some 25 per cent of the world body's budget, wants to put a 20 per cent ceiling on its contributions to the total UN budget.

For a permanent seat in the UN, Japan is to pay a high price: Tokyo will contribute as much to the UN budget as the proposed US sum — some 20 per cent. The big difference, of course, being that Japan religiously pays its dues while America irreverently dares the world body to do something about the long-standing US debt that has practically crippled the UN.

"We're not supposed to authorise overdrafts," an angry UN staff member told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Reform in all these areas is long overdue, those who kept their jobs told the *Weekly* in quiet resignation.

Peace at last?

The prospects for success of the second Irish Republican Army cease-fire announced this week appeared to be better than those of the first cease-fire declared in 1994. **Doaa El-Bey** reports from London

The IRA took the world by surprise by declaring an unconditional cease-fire on Saturday, just two weeks after it was predicted that Northern Ireland was on the brink of civil war. The cease-fire, which was effective from midday on Sunday, put Northern Ireland back on the peace track and renewed hopes that an end to the 25 long years of violence was in sight.

The cease-fire will finally allow Sinn Fein, the political branch of the IRA, into peace process talks this week and will permit its participation in multi-party talks in September, if the cease-fire lasts until then.

The announcement came a day after Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams urged the IRA to reinstate the 1994 cease-fire. Emphasising that he was confident of a positive IRA response, he said that he had provided the IRA with a "detailed report and assessment of the situation".

Sinn Fein's initiative followed the decision earlier this month to cancel or reroute four marches by the Protestant Orangemen — a group loyal to the British throne — which would have proceeded through Catholic areas in Belfast and Londonderry.

With the mood set for concessions and peace in Northern Ireland, it is hoped that the new cease-fire will meet a better fate than the first one declared in 1994, but broken 18 months later by the bombing of London's Canary Wharf last February.

Immediately after the reinstatement of the cease-fire, British Prime Minister Tony Blair described it as "the first step forward", but stressed there was a long way to go.

During the Conservatives' time in power, Sinn Fein repeatedly accused them of wasting the opportunity offered by the 18-month cease-fire by failing to reach lasting peace. The Labour Party seems determined to learn from past mistakes.

With a strong majority in parliament and less dependence on the Unionists — parties loyal to Northern Ireland's union with England — Blair was able to make some vital concessions to Sinn Fein-IRA to secure the new cease-fire.

Perhaps the most vital concession was the decision to abandon the previous government's emphasis on the decommissioning of IRA weapons prior to peace talks.

Blair echoed the opinion expressed in American Senator George Mitchell's report on the subject which stipulated that decommissioning should take place during, or "parallel" to the talks and not before them, as demanded by the Unionists, or after any agreement, as the IRA wanted.

In addition, Blair's government promised Sinn Fein admittance to all-party talks six weeks after an unequivocal cease-fire, and pledged that no outcome would be precluded. Labour also offered Sinn Fein a long demanded time-frame for the peace talks. The expectations are that the talks will be completed some time next spring.

A series of confidence-building measures were also on the table for the IRA, including the quick transfer of IRA prisoners to Ireland and the reform of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), which the IRA claims is biased towards the Protestant community in Ulster.

With almost all their demands now agreed to by the British government, it is believed that the IRA-Sinn Fein are unlikely to break the cease-fire.

Sinn Fein is, in addition, a stronger political party today than it was at the time of the 1994 cease-fire — it has a stronger electoral mandate in Northern Ireland and is represented by two MPs in Westminster.

By declaring a cease-fire, the IRA are accepting that the way to reach their goal — a united Ireland and the end of British rule in Northern Ireland — may be gradually achievable through peace, not violence. The group is hoping that peace talks could give Dublin a wider role in Northern Ireland, which would eventually lead to a form of joint English and Irish sovereignty in the province and finally to the complete dismantling of British rule.

The timing of the cease-fire left the Unionists with two options, either to attend all-party talks before the decommissioning of weapons takes place or boycott the talks.

If the Unionists attend, it will mean giving up one of their most firmly held principles: not to meet Sinn Fein except after decommissioning or setting a schedule for decommissioning.

Unionists rejected the government decommissioning document because it offered no guarantee that the process would begin early in the talks and they believe that Sinn Fein wants to negotiate with "guns under the table".

However, boycotting the talks would show the Unionists as the party that is impeding peace.

"The timing of this is designed to make things awkward for us. It would now be difficult for us to be seen to destroy the talks. You can imagine what the world would say if we did that when a cease-fire had been announced," David Trimble, the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the biggest Unionist faction, said.

In addition, the initial declaration of the two other Unionist parties — the Democratic Unionists and the UK Unionists — that they would boycott the talks if Sinn Fein attended, put great responsibility on UUP's shoulders. If the UUP decided to follow suit, the Unionists would not be represented in the multi-party talks.

Margaret Gibney, the 12-year-old girl from Northern Ireland who appealed to Blair last month to reinstate peace in her country, can enjoy the current peaceful, non-violent atmosphere in Northern Ireland. How long this atmosphere lasts depends on the actions of the different parties involved.

Europe goes American

NATO's eastward expansion ushers in a new era of unchallenged American supremacy, writes **Lamis Andoni** from Washington

In speeches during his European trip, President Bill Clinton promoted the expansion of NATO as the beginning of a new era of security, peace and freedom. "Security for 100 years. Democracy for 100 years. Freedom for 100 years," he promised cheering crowds.

These goals, Clinton argued, will be achieved through the gradual enlargement of NATO to include some East European countries and by fully reintegrating them into the world market. NATO's expansion will guarantee European security and stability and consequently prevent a redivision of the continent. The question that is left unanswered by this argument is how these goals will be achieved through a process that is itself dividing Europe into members and non-NATO-members, especially since Russia appears to be the main target of isolation?

In fact, the main and strongest argument against NATO's expansion is that it may cause the very thing it claims to avoid. "Enlargement may undermine the very security and stability that they [the US and Western European countries] are seeking," wrote Albert Rubenstein from the University of Pennsylvania in the *Journal on Problems of Post-Communism*. In his words, the enlargement of NATO will repolarise Europe and alienate Moscow which might then "question its commitment to nuclear downsizing and cooperation [with the West]."

Clinton has been seeking to assure the Russians that the expansion of NATO is not aimed against Moscow while at the same time promising the rest of Eastern Europe and the former Baltic Soviet states that they could be next in line for membership. It is no surprise that both Russia and die-hard supporters of Cold War politics in the US have reached the conclusion that NATO's enlargement is a reinforcement of the containment of Russia. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the most outspoken defenders of NATO expansion in the US have so far been the latter who, unlike the Clinton administration, are bluntly saying that the move is crucial to prevent the re-emergence of a strong Russian influence.

In a recent column in *The New York Times*, William Saffire, a former official in the Nixon administration, challenged Clinton to tell the American people how NATO's expansion will contain the "Russian threat". "The essential reason for bringing the formerly captive nations of Eastern Europe into the successful military alliance is to deter any future move into Europe by a resurgent Russia," he wrote.

"Now is the strategic moment to prevent such a threat from appearing. An ounce of easy expansion today is worth a ton of confrontation tomorrow. Russia is down but far from out. With its literate population and unlimited resources, now unstultified by Communism, it will regain its superpower status soon," Saffire, usually a critic of Clinton's policies, explained.

The Clinton administration, however, has not endorsed this line of reasoning. Instead, it argues that the enemies of Eastern Europe are ethnic conflict, extreme forms of nationalism and religious and racial hatred. But a pledge to help Europe prevent ethnic and national conflicts entails a commitment for which the American public is perhaps not ready to pay in either blood or money.

According to US Congress estimates, the enlargement of NATO will cost $16 billion for the next 10 years, to accomplish what is described as "a reorientation" of military forces in Eastern Europe. This involves improving intelligence gathering, upgrading communications systems and military training.

Clinton has yet to secure support from the House of Representatives and Senate to fund NATO's enlargement and to convince the American public that the military spending involved is consistent with American interests. Furthermore, many in the Congress and indeed the public, are concerned about the prospect of American military involvement in ethnic strife in Europe. Defence Secretary William Cohen has sought to allay such fears by asserting that there will be no significant troop deployment in Europe.

Clinton might not have to worry about such concerns until January when the Congress will start discussing the ratification of the NATO treaty — unless of course an explosive situation arises in Europe to test American resolve before then. But it already seems that most of the debate will centre on the price that America has to pay while the real issue, the broader meaning of the expansion of NATO to American foreign policy, will be sidelined.

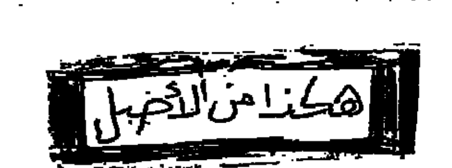
William Pfaff, a syndicated columnist, has been one of very few in the American mainstream media to call for a definition of the American role and policy in Eastern Europe. In an article this week, he makes the point that "a general conception of policy becomes essential when the country undertakes a major change in its national commitments, including very serious downside risks to which this administration is committing itself."

In Pfaff's view, the US is becoming Euro-centric. It emphasises harmony with and in Europe while characterising its relationship with the rest of the world in the context of economic and cultural conflict. He notes that economic conflict is the framework through which the US approaches the nations of Southeast Asia, for instance, because they cannot be incorporated into a harmonious cultural alliance with the US in the same way that Europe can.

The underlying notion of "racial" and cultural "harmony" is also used, and more forcefully, by advocates of Cold War values who are clearer in providing a conceptual framework for a dividing line based on a nation's readiness to conform to Western cultural and economic values. "This is the beginning of these countries' reintegration into the Western spirit," said Yum Novak, a former broadcaster for the CIA-backed anti-communist Radio Free Europe. Such statements echo a divisive view of the world that brings back to mind Samuel Huntington's controversial theory of an inevitable "Clash of Civilisations."

Although American officials have never publicly espoused Huntington's concepts, the repeated stress on shared values and the emergence of Euro-centric policies follow the trend. For there is little in the debate in the US about how the enlargement of the US-led military alliance will affect the rest of the world. For example, there is not much being said about how America's drive to foster its role as the sole world superpower — while pre-empting its European partners from taking a part in international affairs — will influence the areas of conflict in the world.

For the time being, Clinton seems to be mainly interested in assuring his people that the US is maintaining its international influence. After all, NATO's expansion is viewed here as a great breakthrough for American diplomacy. At what price for the rest of the world and even for the Americans is a question that has yet to be addressed.



Che — forever young

At last, the mortal remains of Che Guevara were returned to their final resting place in his beloved Cuba, writes **Jooneed Khan**

Ernesto Guevara Lynch de la Serna, the Argentine-Cuban revolutionary know the world over as Che and executed by United States-trained soldiers deep inside Bolivia 30 years ago, has been called *El Nacedor* — the ever-reborn — by the Uruguayan writer, Eduardo Galeano.

That appellation was never truer than on Saturday, 12 July, when Che's mortal remains, and those of three of his fallen comrades, were flown back from the small Bolivian town of Santa Cruz de la Sierra to the Cuban military air base of San Antonio de los Banos, near Havana, for a moving homecoming presided over by his old guerrilla *compañero* Fidel Castro and by his daughter Aleida Guevara March.

The midnight ceremony was broadcast live on state radio and television. Apparently unsure that triumphant neo-liberalism and creeping US global hegemony could lay to rest the Guevara mystique, the mainstream media in the West went to work trivialising the legacy of the handsome young doctor who, at the age of 30, helped Castro and his comrades liberate Havana from the Batista dictatorship in 1959, assumed various ministerial responsibilities in the Cuban government, then broke softly, with Castro after accusing the former Soviet Union of imperialism. "The USSR is a lie protected by an army," he said.

In the heyday of Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Nasser, Ben Bella, Nkrumah and Lumumba, Che turned to Third World militancy of Tricontinentalism, taking the message of the Cuban revolution to Asia and Africa: he found himself with Laurent-Desiré Kabila in the Congo long enough, in 1965, to characterise as "an adventurer, a tourist, an absentee leader and womaniser" the self-proclaimed President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, who toppled the Mobutu dictatorship last May.

In November 1966, saying farewell to his wife and children and leaving them in the care of the Cuban Revolution, Che arrived in Bolivia disguised as clean-shaven Uruguayan businessman Ramon Benitez, or alternatively as special envoy of the Organisation of American States, Adolfo Mena Gonzalez, a Uruguayan national. His mission is to ignite a source of insurgency with Bolivia, capable of spreading to the rest of Latin America and liberating the continent from US domination. Eleven months later, his gambit was blocked and he was executed at the age of 39.

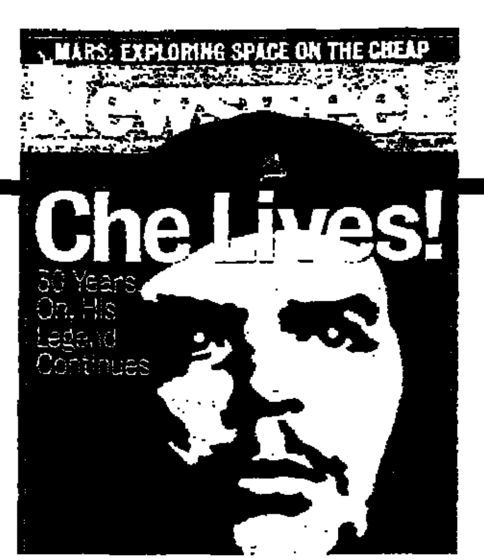
"Che Chic", headlined *Newsweek* last week, with a two-page spread highlighting the commercialisation of Che iconography: a CD for Rage Against the Machine, a sticker for Austrian skis, a bag of coffee sold in Finland, even a Swatch. "Part of Guevara's appeal is that his revolutionary ideals no longer pose much of a threat in the post-cold-war world," wrote the US magazine in a shotgun attack ridiculing "Che Lite" even as it demonised him as "a murderous interloper ... and cold-hearted disciplinarian who sent 55 people to their deaths".

At the homecoming ceremony in Havana on 12 July, Aleida Guevara March read an address to Castro on behalf of the children of the four fallen heroes which said, in part: "Over 30 years ago our fathers bade us farewell; they left to continue the ideals of Bolivar and Marti of a united and independent [Latin American] continent. We didn't see them again. [We] were very young then; now we are men and women. Today their remains have come back to us, but they have not returned defeated: they come transformed into heroes, eternally young, valiant, strong and daring. No one can take that away from us: they will live forever in their sons and daughters, in the hearts of the people."

Che's hands, cut off by Argentine agents for identification purposes shortly after his execution, according to the Bolivian version, and preserved in formaldehyde, as well as a death mask made of wax to prove he was actually dead, have been in Cuba's precious custody since 1970.

The repatriated remains will lie in state in the Granma Hall of the Armed Forces Ministry at the Plaza de la Revolucion until next October, when they will be taken for burial in Santa Clara, a town east of Havana which was the launching point of an attack by Che in December 1958, in the final days of the Cuban Revolution. A mausoleum to Che will be inaugurated and an international conference will be held.

The story of the return of Che's hands and death mask to Cuba is in itself an amazing tale of



intrigue, involving the man who was Bolivia's minister of the interior at the time of Che's capture and execution in 1967, Antonio Arguedas, and a Bolivian journalist, Jorge Suarez.

Cuban journalists, Adys Cupull and Froilan Gonzalez, co-authors of *The CIA against the Che* wrote that Arguedas "asked for the hands and hid them until he could return them to Cuba. In 1970, following his traditional 26 July speech, Castro publicly thanked Arguedas for having sent Che's Bolivia Diary and hands to Cuba. In interviews, Arguedas has said that he was a leftist sympathiser and admirer of Che. At the very least, he was a double agent working both for the CIA and Cuba.

By cutting off the hands of the dead guerrilla leader, the US-backed junta of General Rene Barrientos — in power at that time in La Paz — in fact looked to hide the truth about the circumstances of Che's death: it had announced that Che had been killed in combat, his body cremated, his ashes scattered in the jungle.

The truth is Che's small band of less than 40 guerrillas, viewed with mistrust by the Bolivian communists, cut off from the peasantry and beset by infiltration, desertions and mishaps, was quickly outnumbered and outgunned by more than 1500 US-trained Bolivian rangers — following their first bloody encounter with the army in the ravines of Nancahuazu on 23 March, 1967.

Guided by a local peasant, who was also an army informer, its rear-guard of 16 men and one woman, Tamara Bunke, had been led into an ambush on 31 August. By 8 October Che's column had been surrounded in the Churo canyon. Che had covered his men's escape, but had been hit in the leg, his Garand rifle crippled and his revolver out of ammunition.

Captured, Che and three of his comrades were taken to the nearby village of La Higuera, where Che was held in the local school house — while his companions were executed. On 9 October, an order came from La Paz. "A mysterious message, about which one can't say whether it came from army headquarters, the presidential palace or the US Embassy," writes Philippe Gavi in his 1970 book *Che Guevara*.

Soon after, major Miguel Ayoroa and colonel Andres Selnich ordered a young Bolivian soldier, Mario Teran, to execute Guevara, writes Gavi. According to General Mario Vargas Salina, then a 30-year-old officer based in Vallegrande, whose confessions to *New York Times* journalist and Che biographer Jon Lee Anderson in 1995 led to the discovery of Che's burial site and the recovery of his remains. Teran said that Che's last words were: "Shoot, coward! You are going to kill a man."

Vargas' revelations about Che's burial site, set off a labourious 600-day investigation by a team of 50 Cuban and Argentine experts under the leadership of Cuba forensic specialist Dr. Jorge Gonzalez. The Vallegrande airstrip turned out to be the right spot. Seven bodies were exhumed, and the one finally identified via dental and other medical records as Che's had the hands severed, and had been buried barefoot, just as it had been exposed for public viewing after his execution in 1967 — on the outdoor laundry slab of the local Vallegrande hospital.

"Many of us only now understand your boldness in pointing out [in 1965] the cracks in the Kremlin's walls, which to us appeared so solid," writes Frei Betto, a Brazilian Franciscan, in an Open letter to Che, published recently in the Nicaraguan capital, Managua. "In spite of many defeats and mistakes, we have made important conquests in these 30 years. There is much to do. We still preserve with love your major heritage to us: the internationalist spirit and the Cuban Revolution."

Badgering the Russian bear

Visits by top level US officials to Russia's former satellites in Eastern Europe appear to have set the seal on American hegemony over the region, **Abdel-Malik Khalil** writes from Moscow

United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met Russia's Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov in St Petersburg on 13 July. She is scheduled to meet with him again in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur, where the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit meeting is taking place next week.

Topping Albright's agenda are assurances that the US does not want to isolate Russia further in what used to be its own backyard.

The Albright-Primakov meeting will take place soon after Primakov's visit to South Korea. Russia is hoping to sign a number of bilateral economic and trade agreements with South Korea. As Russia loses further control of the pace of change in Europe, Moscow has taken a keen interest in trying to strengthen its ties with its Asian neighbours. Moscow has attempted to mediate between the Communist regime in North Korea, South Korea and Washington. Russia has also been making friendly overtures to China, Japan and other Asian powers.

Meanwhile, there are several unresolved problems that plague Russian-American relations, the main one being arms control. Solutions are being sought through the 30-nation talks in the Austrian capital Vienna on revising a treaty on conventional forces in Europe, setting limits on conventional arms, the second US-Russia strategic arms reduction treaty known as START II (which remains unratified by the Russian parliament), and START III, the next phase of US-Russian strategic arms reduction negotiations.

The Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have campaigned hard at NATO headquarters in Brussels, in other Western European capitals and in Washington for NATO membership. "Our challenge is to build a fully integrated Europe that includes every European democracy willing to meet its responsibilities," Albright told reporters in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius after meeting with her three Baltic counterparts. In an indirect snub to Moscow, Albright added that, "History has taught us that your freedom is our freedom."

"I am here to tell the Baltic people that a vision of a united Europe includes you. We have said all along that NATO is open to all democratic, market systems in Europe and that all countries are eligible. It doesn't matter where they are located on the map, they are eligible for membership of NATO. It is the open-door aspect that was emphasised in Madrid," Albright said on Russian television during her visit to Lithuania.

However, all US officials, like Albright, stress that America does not want to isolate Russia in Europe. The US is determined to assist Eastern European countries in their efforts to modernise their aging Soviet-style armies and outdated arms. Russia no longer has a monopoly over the arms market in Eastern Europe as weapon manufacturers from the US, France, Britain and Sweden compete to sell their latest products. Indeed, most Eastern Europeans are eager to rid themselves of what they regard as redundant and sub-standard Russian weaponry. Russia is desperately trying to hold onto its former markets in the region. Russian arms manufacturers are under tremendous pressure to modernise their products.

Coinciding with Albright's visit to the region, US Defence Secretary William Cohen visited Ukraine and held security talks with Ukraine's President Leonid Kuchma. Ukraine recently settled a major dispute with its giant neighbour to the north, Russia, over the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet and signed a treaty of friendship with Russia. "We hope to help the Ukraine military to reform, to prepare itself for the future, and we will cooperate in information and technology sharing, medical technology and mapping techniques," Cohen told reporters in Kiev. He applauded Kuchma for signing the NATO-Ukraine charter and praised the 50-million strong Slavic republic for instituting radical free-market reforms.



DEMOCRACY RULES in Liberia as over 750,000 Liberians were called to vote in historic polls set to turn the page on seven years of devastating civil war.

13 political parties are taking part in presidential and legislative elections. Polling booths opened on Saturday. These are the first elections to be held in Liberia since 1985.

Two front-runners in the presidential race: the National Patriotic Party, led by Charles Taylor, who ignited the civil war in December 1989, and the Unity Party of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a former finance minister who quit a senior United Nations post to challenge Taylor. Despite Johnson-Sirleaf's initial support for Taylor's cause, she has campaigned hard on a clean-hands platform. But pundits say her best hope is to take the poll to a second round.

Observers believe that Taylor will emerge as the clear winner in the first round of voting. Taylor is a populist leader and a millionaire who has close connections with Libya. *(photo: AFP)*

America isn't colour-blind

Race relations still dominate American cultural discourse, writes **Gamal Nkrumah** from Nashville, Tennessee

In the 1960s the joke in Washington was, "What has four eyes but can't see?" The answer: "Mississippi." What Mississippi could not see was "the truth about racism and the white supremacist culture in America's Deep South," as a young African American explained at a recent conference in Nashville on race relations.

But racial conflict is not an exclusively Southern phenomenon. A series of events that took place last week came as a grim reminder that race relations are a serious problem throughout the contemporary US:

— Racial tensions in the Midwest erupted when three white teenagers were attacked — allegedly by black gangsters — in Flint, Michigan. One of the teenagers was killed.

— Controversy raged as a criminal court judge in Memphis, Tennessee, urged the reopening of the investigation into the assassination of Dr Martin Luther King. Last Friday, Judge Joseph Brown told defense lawyers and state prosecutors that he wants to see the results of FBI forensic tests from 1968. In a much-publicised incident last March, Dexter King, King's son and chief executive officer of the Atlanta-based Dr Martin Luther King Centre for Non-Violent Social Change Inc., pronounced James Earl Ray, his father's alleged white murderer, "innocent".

— The FBI has reopened the 1963 case in which a timed explosive device killed four black girls in a Birmingham, Alabama, Baptist church. Incidentally, the FBI's move came a day after the release of *Four Little Girls*, a documentary produced by African American director Spike Lee that is currently taking African American communities around the country by storm.

— The US census is introducing a new "mixed race" category, in response to a highly publicised debate that captured attention largely because of professional golfer Tiger Woods, who describes himself as "Cablinasian" — a mixed-race classification of those who claim to have Caucasian, Black, Native American and Asian genes. Most blacks see this as yet another attempt to divide and rule.

Feelings are running high. Even so-called "moderate" and mainstream organisations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), the country's oldest and largest civil rights organisation, have sounded alarm bells. Meanwhile, more militant groups like the Nation of Islam, which sponsored the Million Man March in 1995, are also up in arms and insist they are not crying wolf.

The tension gripping the country is reflected in the semantic battle over this issue. Whites, when they admit to the problem's existence, call it the "race issue". Blacks counter that the problem's true name is "racism" and "white supremacy".

Responding to the crisis, President Bill Clinton appointed an advisory panel last week to examine the state of race relations throughout America. "We've still got a long way to go before we feel truly comfortable working with each other, living with each other, relating to each other and helping solve one another's problems," Clinton confessed in an interview with *Newsweek* recently.

However, the issue is also creating heated debate within the black community as moderate black organisations are being increasingly criticised by more militant ones. The NAACP came under fire last week as it convened its 88th annual convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Professor Manning Marable, director of African American Studies at Columbia University, launched a biting attack on the NAACP: "We can't be frozen in time, thinking the strategy of 'We shall overcome' is appropriate for the hip-hop generation".

Furthermore, the keynote speaker was Governor Thomas Ridge of Pennsylvania, who has signed 90 death warrants in his tenure. The death penalty is a contentious issue in the US, as many observers allege that its use by the judicial system is racially biased. This issue comes at a time when Pittsburgh's African American community is particularly outraged at the results of the trial of five white police officers involved in the 1995 murder of black motorist Jonny Gummage. One of the officers has been acquitted, while the other four are still free as a result of a mistrial. "All the suffering that African-Americans underwent during and after slavery is being justified by the law," black Representative Joe Towns of Memphis, Tennessee, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in Nashville.

The American black community is showing signs of crisis. It has become commonplace for disillusioned black youngsters to resort to violence. Last week, Malcolm Shabazz, Malcolm X's grandson and namesake, pleaded guilty to killing his grandmother, Malcolm's widow Betty Shabazz, in Yonkers, New York. This comes at a time when the US Congress is considering new laws making it easier to try and jail juvenile offenders as adult criminals.

In this charged atmosphere, the historically black Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, held its 31st "Race Relations Institute" last week. Keynote speaker David DuBois warned, "The denial by European Americans of feelings and attitudes of inherent inferiority on the part of African Americans, and the consequent sense of superiority on the part of European Americans is the most common and most serious problem facing America today."

DuBois, Founding President of the WEB Foundation, professor of mass communications at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and stepson of the celebrated African American activist and thinker, WEB DuBois, put it in a nutshell: "So cruel and inhuman was the protracted treatment of the Native American and the African by those who ruled and profited from that rule that at the time the only defense of their own humanity was belief in the inferiority of 'the others'. This then became the Creed. And all institutions of the land — government, church, school, factory, boardroom, club house and home — adopted this Creed and have lived by it ever since, concealing from successive generations the truth," DuBois said.

Among the highlights of the Nashville conference was Dr Frances Cress Wesling, a Washington-based black psychiatrist who has acquired international notoriety for her controversial theory of the origins of white supremacist culture. "Who is TJ? How come everyone knows OJ and no one knows TJ?" she queried. When nobody at the conference could figure out who TJ was, she revealed dramatically, "Well, he is Timothy J McVeigh". OJ Simpson was tried for allegedly killing two people, including his wife, while TJ murdered 168 people, including 19 children, and injured many more. But fascination with OJ's trials and tribulations have become a curious national pastime. "This strange obsession with OJ is due to the fact that he is suspected of killing his white wife," Wesling told her mainly black audience, which enthusiastically registered its endorsement.

Wesling recently explained to *Newsweek* that McVeigh's lawyer, Richard Burr, set up his defense strategy thus: "There is violence. There is much death. There is tremendous suffering. But there is also a person at the centre whom you [the white people] will not be able to dismiss easily as a monster or a demon, who could be your son, your brother, your grandson. The defence kept referring to McVeigh as looking like 'the boy next door'." She continued by saying that for years the lynching of black men was condoned in America's Deep South, and that the murderers all looked like "the boy next door".

Wesling then proceeded to elaborate on her theory on the roots of white racism, which she attributes to an attempt by whites to assure the survival of their gene pool in an increasingly non-white world.

Chuckles and spontaneous outbursts of laughter echoed around the hall as she delved into the innuendos and racial overtones of "symbols in America's most popular sports — big brown ball games like [American] football, basketball and baseball, and small white ball games like tennis and golf." Wesling's anecdotes enthralled her listeners who rose to give her a resounding standing ovation as she stepped down from the podium. Outside the lecture hall, her books were selling like hot cakes.

The last time I visited Nashville was in 1986. Eleven years later, this Southern boomtown is as racially divided as ever. But Nashville has also become more cosmopolitan and ethnically diversified. According to the US census data, 369,000 African Americans moved from northern cities back to the South between 1990 and 1995 — an unprecedented rate of relocation, 92 per cent higher than in the 1980s. Scores of ethnically Chinese, Korean, and Mexican Americans and Continental Africans have moved into the city.

Thus Nashville, like many other cities in America, is no longer a black and white town. Yet increased diversity has not necessarily led to the alleviation of the problems of race relations, and the race issues that plague the white and black communities throughout the United States still rage.

Toshka spin-offs

A Saudi prince's investment in Toshka has sparked investor interest. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

A recent move by a Saudi billionaire to establish a company to reclaim 435,000 feddans (1 feddan=1 acre) of desert land in the new Upper Egypt Toshka project has sparked investor interest in the area.

Prince Al-Walid Bin Talal's proposal *to set up a land reclamation company in* this region, initially approved by Egypt's Cabinet last May, was welcomed by officials and businessmen as a major catalyst for attracting more private capital to the New Valley projects.

"The Toshka and New Valley projects are among the most favoured investments for Arab and Egyptian businessmen," said Mohamed Abul-Enein, a leading businessman who is also a member of parliament.

The Toshka project is part of the government's massive New Valley project aimed at creating a new delta in the Western Desert through the reclamation of about 400,000 feddans initially and encouraging relocation to ease the pressure on densely populated areas in Egypt's Nile Valley. The total cost of the project is roughly LE300 billion to LE500 billion over the next 20 years, with the private sector expected to shoulder the greater part of the bill.

"I believe this [interest in the area] is largely due to the new Investment Guarantees and Incentives Law passed by the People's Assembly last May," Abul-Enein added.

This law grants investors in the Toshka and New Valley projects tax breaks of up to 20 years, as well as guarantees against nationalisation and sequestration of land and property.

Talal's Kingdom Agricultural Company, with a start-up capital of LE1 billion, is viewed by officials and businessmen as a indication that more investments are on the way.

In a complementary move, the Cabinet, shortly after the investments law was passed, approved the allocation of 180,000 *feddans to 18 major investors* (10,000 feddans/investor).

The list of investors granted a plot of land reads like a litany of Egypt's business tycoons, and includes such magnates as Ceramica Cleopatra's Mohamed Abul-Enein, Salah Diab, chairman of the Project and Investment Consulting Company (PICO), the Bahgat Group's Ahmed Bahgat. It also includes two Saudi investors (Fahd Al-Shobkshi and Abdel-Rahman Al-Sharbatli).

The 18-member list of investors, some of whom are investing in agricultural projects for the first time, have already formed the Agricultural Development Company (ADC). The company, with a paid-up capital of LE200 million, aims at reclaiming an initial area of 150,000 feddans in El-Owainat, southeast of the New Valley project site.

Talal's initiative has also ignited Arab investor interest in Toshka. Last week, the government received a request from Ghazi Al-Qosaibi, a Kuwaiti investor, to reclaim nearly 25,000 feddans, with the objective of setting up an agro-industrial complex in the Toshka area.

But not everyone is thrilled with the *idea of allocating large plots of land to* Arab investors — or to investors, in general.

Yassin Serageddin, deputy chairman of the liberal Wafd Party told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he strongly objects to allocating any land to any investors.

"I object to this policy and to the New Valley project as a whole," said Serageddin. "I tried many times to convince Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and Agriculture Minister Wali that *this* massive project should be discussed extensively by the parliament's Agricultural Committee."

Ganzouri's government, however, has been adamant in pushing along this project, regarding it as Egypt's head start into the 21st century.

"For this reason, we simply see this project as a new, serious adventure," added the Wafd official.

Serageddin claimed that this was not the first time the government has pushed ahead with a similarly massive project without carefully studying it. "In the 1950s, Gamal Abdel-Nasser launched the massive El-Tahrir project, which ultimately proved to be a failure," he said. "The government is now *trying to sell it off.*"

Later, he added, Anwar El-Sadat got the ball rolling on El-Sallhiya project which, again, "proved to be a complete fiasco."

"We should not start projects which we are not sure about," he said.

The leftist Tagammu Party's El-Badri Farghali is also opposed to the land allocation process, but focuses his concerns to the large plot of land allocated to Talal.

How, Farghali asked, could the government allocate 435,000 feddans of land to one investor "at a time when a large number of tenant farmers are threatened with eviction as a result of the full implementation of the landlord-tenant law, *scheduled to go into effect* next October."

And, asked Farghali, what exactly does the Saudi prince know about reclaiming desert land? "I'm sure that this prince will not be able to fulfil his commitments to this project," he said, adding that with this move, Talal will be the first man in recent Egyptian history to own such a large area of land.

Government officials, naturally, are not buying into this line of reasoning. "*Egypt's previous* land reclamation experiences did not show great success because the philosophy behind them was that it is the government that will shoulder all the costs," explained Saad Nassar, deputy minister of agriculture.

"In the New Valley project, the private sector, free from government bureaucracy and willing to make a long-term commitment with its financial resources, will be given the chance to run these large-scale projects," he argued.

He said "This is by no means a negative land reclamation adventure."

Echoing Nassar's statements, Mohamed Fathallah, chairman of the Agricultural Projects Department in the General Authority for Rehabilitation *Projects and Agricultural Development* (GARPAD), sees the private sector as the key to the success of such projects.

"Since the government has decided to give private investors the upper hand in the New Valley projects, they [investors] should live up to this objective," stated Fathallah.

They should, for example, "focus on project implementation deadlines and conduct reliable feasibility studies for their proposals in order to maximise their utilisation of existing resources," he added.

The government's responsibility, elaborated Fathallah, "is to provide these investors with the most recent studies on arable land and the locations of underground water deposits."

"In this way, we will be sure that the New Valley project will be in full swing as soon as possible," said Fathallah.

Safe and not sorry

EGYPT placed fourth out of 32 developing countries in an index evaluating the risks to business in emerging markets, Youssef Boutros-Ghali, the minister of economy, said last week.

The index, issued by the Credit Suisse Bank, evaluates the countries' exchange rates, as well as over 20 other economic, political and financial factors.

In the final tally, Egypt ranked fourth after Singapore, Chile and Poland, but pushed past other thriving emerging markets such as Malaysia, South Korea and Indonesia.

Egypt's score on the index was 60.9, with any figure less than 70 points implying a low-risk country.

Emerging markets risk index

Singapore	46.5
Chile	51.1
Poland	58.6
Egypt	60.9
Indonesia	61.9
China	63
Argentina	63.2
Malaysia	65.2
Brazil	65.5
Mexico	65.7

EgyptAir plane loans

THE EUROPEAN Investment Bank (EIB) granted EgyptAir a 13-year loan of $85 million to be used in financing its purchase of two Airbus aircraft, scheduled for delivery within the next two months.

According to the loan agreement, EgyptAir, the national carrier, will have a grace period of three years, after which it will start repaying the loan on a biannual basis for a period of 10 years at a variable interest rate.

Last February, the state-owned airline which dominates the Egyptian domestic market, announced that it was buying eight new planes. The $1.2 billion purchase falls within the framework of a plan to reduce expenses by buying fuel-efficient airplanes.

EgyptAir posted an LE22.5 million profit for the nine-month period ending March 1997.

EIB is the European Union's long-term financing institution. It offers soft loans tailored to meet the needs of specific projects.

Ruffled tempers over bank ratings

A recent evaluation of Egyptian banks by Moody's Interbank Credit Service was labelled as "unfair" by both public sector and joint-venture bank representatives. **Niveen Wahish** reports

An unsolicited and poor international rating for four major Egyptian public sector banks and three joint-venture banks has left many Egyptian bankers and officials stunned and fuming after the country received a stellar rating just months ago from another rating agency.

The evaluation, conducted by Moody's Interbank Credit Service, included an assessment of long and short-term foreign currency deposits and the financial strength of the National Bank of Egypt (NBE), Banque Misr, Banque du Caire and the Bank of Alexandria.

While the NBE came away with a D rating, the three other public sector banks were the less-than-proud recipients of an E rating — the lowest grade assigned to any bank in the Middle East.

The ratings are designed to measure the risk of a bank defaulting on its foreign currency obligations, and takes into account the bank's reputation, quality of loans, number of branches and ability to meet its long and short-term obligations.

Moody's report frustrated Egyptian banking officials, coming at a time when the government is pushing hard for banking sector reforms in a bid to lure investments. Similarly, it follows shortly after a Standard & Poor's rating of the Egyptian economy. The company had given Egypt its highest investment-grade *rating of B-minus long-term and A-minus* short-term for foreign currency credit rating, and an A-minus long-term and A-minus short-term for local currency credit rating.

Three other joint venture banks, the Commercial International Bank (CIB), the Egyptian-American Bank (EAB) and Misr International Bank (MIBank), were also rated by Moody's. And, although they fared better than the public sector banks, their officials were not pleased either.

"The rating does not do justice to Egyptian joint-venture banks," *declared* Mohamed Ozlap, senior general manager of MIBank, adding that the reforms undertaken by the banking sector over the last few years are unparalleled in any other sector.

"Through increased competition, not only have service and performance been upgraded, but there is a greater degree of transparency in the banks' transactions," he added.

Moody's ratings may not have measured up to Ozlap's expectations, but they have not had a negative impact on the bank's business. Late last month, a Global Depository Receipt (GDR) issue of 20 per cent of Banque Misr's shares in MIBank closed six times oversubscribed on the London Stock Exchange. MIBank is a joint-venture between Banque Misr, Misr Insurance Company, individual investors and a number of international institutions.

One possible reason behind the poor rating, argue some banking officials, is that it was unsolicited by the institutions.

Rating companies claim that there is no difference between solicited and unsolicited ratings, said Ozlap. But "I believe that solicited ratings tend to be more positive," he argued.

In carrying out an unsolicited rating, the rating company may not refer back to the institution being evaluated, which means that they may overlook some vital information, added MIBank's chief.

Another problem with Moody's rating, noted Mona Qassem, head of Banque Misr's research department, is that the rating company applied the same criteria to both the public sector and joint-venture banks.

One difference between these banks, she said, is that public sector banks have a social and economic responsibility which joint-venture banks are neither willing nor capable of shouldering. For example, public sector *banks have contributed to turning around loss-*making state-owned enterprises, either by rescheduling their debts or through buying a percentage of their equity, stated Qassem.

"Public banks have shouldered the hardest phase of the economic reform programme — that of fiscal and monetary deregulation," she explained.

The poor grading they received, said Qassem, was because Moody's seemed to have depended on the banks' published budgets. And, she stressed, this is not enough. Ozlap agrees. *Ratings*, in general, depend on transparency, he noted.

"If they [rating companies] depend only on the budgets published by the banks, then they don't have a complete picture of the banks' activities," said Ozlap. "Public sector banks have many undervalued assets which would not show on a balance sheet."

Additional reporting by ***Shereen Abdel-Razek***

Genetic ban piques US

Genetically-altered crops are banned in Egypt, and the US is fuming. **Gihan Shahine** reports

A decision by Egypt's Health Ministry to ban the import of cereals produced with the help of genetic engineering has irked US De*partment of Agriculture (USDA) officials.*

Hearing about the decree only last week, USDA officials responded to the ministry's decision saying they "are not worried, but very concerned". But the decree, passed earlier this month by Health Minister Ismail Sallam, they add, has not yet affected the flow of trade or their level of exports.

Sallam decreed at the beginning of this month that all shipments of cereal or dry legumes must be accompanied by a certificate assuring that no transgenic process has been used in the cultivation of the crop.

The decree is a health precaution, the health minister was reported as saying, and was issued because of the possibility that genetically engineered agricultural products may be dangerous to the health.

Although there is no evidence backing this claim, the ministry is intent on keeping the ban in place until genetically-altered foodstuffs are proven safe for human consumption.

According to Fahmy Seddik, a specialist at the Cairo-based Nutrition Institute, the transgenic process is adopted by producers to in*crease the quality and quantity of the crop* at a lower price. The process aims at altering the genetic structure of the plants.

But while no clear evidence exists on whether the genetically-altered plants are hazardous to the health, Egyptian Health Ministry officials wanted to "play it safe and ban transgenic foodstuffs until international health organisations offer a definitive answer to this query," said Zeinab Abdel-Halim, head of the ministry's Nutrition Department.

At first glance, Sallam's decree seemed to target wheat imports. According to 1996-97 figures, Egypt is second only to Japan as the largest importer of US wheat, purchasing 2.9 million metric tons of the crop over that year.

But fears have arisen also over corn, a crop largely produced by genetic engineering. Last year, Egypt ranked sixth in corn imports, buying roughly 2.3 million tons of the crop in 1996 alone. In this light, USDA and US exporters' concerns seem to equally target corn and wheat exports in the future.

Cotton glut feared

Private companies have the right to deal in cotton directly, but the government has maintained the minimum price system. **Niveen Wahish** writes

Egyptian *private sector traders* and companies received the green light from the government to buy, market, gin and export this season's cotton crop, but still have to contend with the minimum delivery price system.

This new deal, introduced by the government early this week, aimed at boosting private sector involvement in this industry long dominated by the state. But the initiative may have been undermined by the fact that the minimum guarantee price sys*tem was not annulled simultaneously.*

The guarantee price system, in force for two seasons, was originally designed to provide farmers with a fixed income, and to keep them from cultivating other more profitable crops.

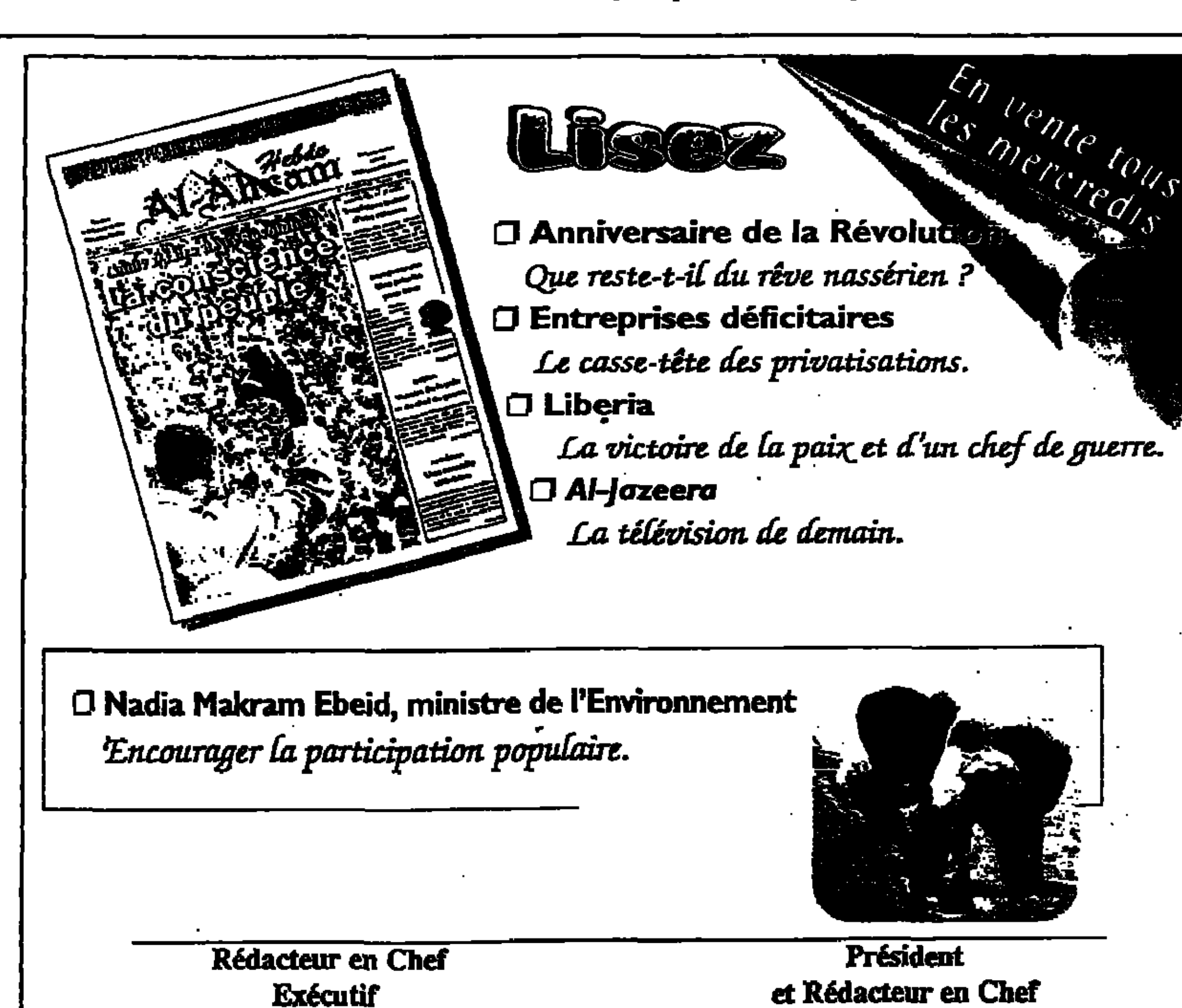
This system also enables farmers to sell the crops to anyone offering a price higher than the LE500 specified by the government.

But low demand for Egyptian cotton over *the past two seasons* has *rendered* this a costly system for cotton traders and companies, forcing them to swallow substantial losses.

"The new policy is actually identical to that in place in 1996-97," said Zaki Edkawi, chairman of the Edkawi Trading Trust Company. "The minimum delivery price governs the minimum costs of export companies."

Cotton traders, he warned, will not be willing to pay the minimum price and take the risk of *selling the crop given the current* state of the market.

There is already a surplus of two million qantars (1 qantar = 50 kilogrammes) of long-staple cotton left over from last season, coupled with an estimated yield of seven million qantars this year, said Edkawi. Local consumption is only 4.5 million qantars. Moreover, the Asian and European markets for long-staple cotton are covered by US Pima cotton.



Market report

GMI slips again

THE GENERAL Market Index lost 5.53 points during the week ending 17 July, levelling off at 344.32. The volume of transactions reached LE272.5 million.

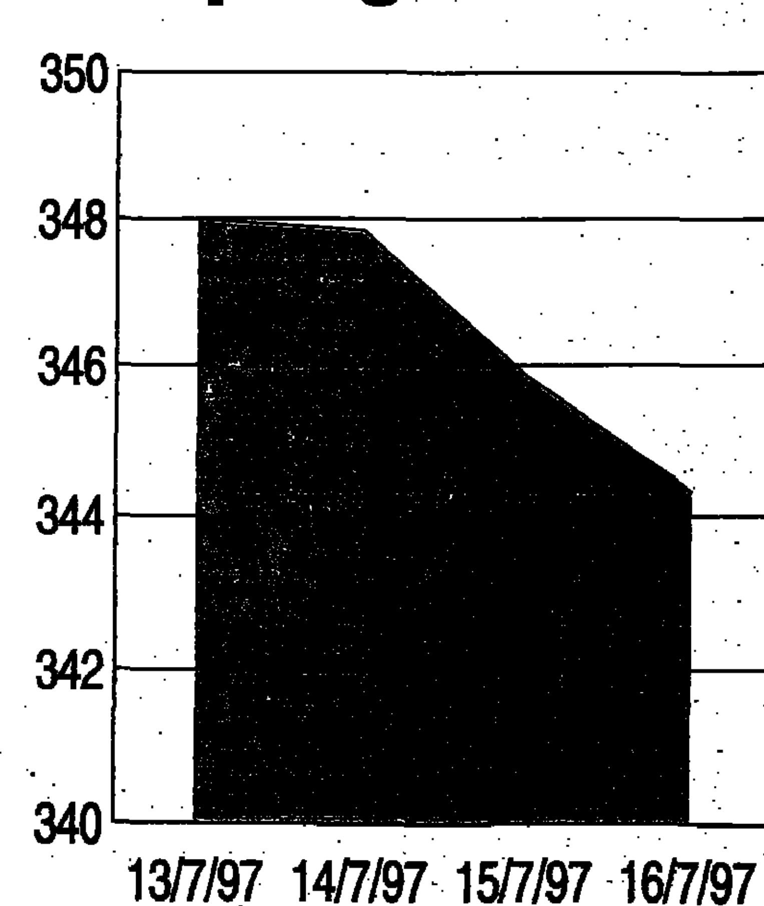
Hardest hit in trading activity were the milling companies, with the shares of the Middle and West Delta Mills leading the six mill companies with an 8.86 per cent drop in value. The company's shares closed at LE76.1 per share.

Shares of the Egyptian-American Bank (EAB) led the market in terms of volume and value of trading. The EAB offered 319,300 shares for public subscription worth LE58.8 million, with the transactions in its shares accounting for 21.58 per cent of total market turnover. But the shares, offered at LE127, closed at LE121.

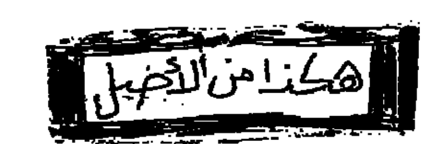
Another new offering was made by the Holding Company for Cotton and International Trade, which put up for sale 30,000 shares of its subsidiary, the Arab Ginning Company. The shares, offered at LE60, closed one quarter of a point higher.

The Mohandes Insurance Company's stock registered the greatest increase in value, gaining 16.36 per cent to level off at LE44.1. On the other side of the scale, shares of the Memphis Pharmaceuticals and Chemical Industries Company suffered the biggest loss, dropping in value by 13.52 per cent to close at LE86.

In all, the shares of 31 companies increased in value, 57 decreased and 30 remained unchanged.



Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



With Zionist eyes riveted on Palestine since the late 19th century, when it was part of the Ottoman Empire, *Al-Ahram* was at the heart of a debate on Jewish immigration to Palestine. The debate produced many pointers to the ultimate Zionist goal — not just settlement in Palestine, but the acquisition of as much land as Jews could lay their hands on, as a prelude to establishing a state. These were the roots of today's Palestinian problem and Israel's unquenched thirst for more land. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk**, tells the story from reports in *Al-Ahram*

Illustration by: Makram Honein

"The Zionist movement" was the headline of one of *Al-Ahram*'s letters from its readers on 10 July 1909. Addressing *Al-Ahram*'s coverage of what would increasingly become a central issue of concern — Zionist immigration to Palestine — the author of the letter suggested that *Al-Ahram* had succeeded in dispelling many of the rumours which many Jews had circulated in the Egyptian press. "And why should it not be so," he asks, "when through this effort, *Al-Ahram* has enlightened our minds through its persistence and force of argument. Were it not for *Al-Ahram*, all the Jews would as one demand this legacy and so ardent are they in pursuing it that they would resort to any means toward this end, even through the device of securing a temporary lease on the land...

"The Ottoman state in particular should be alert so as not to be taken by surprise by them or by the European powers, since it has demonstrated on more than one occasion that it is very willing to provide the Jews any area outside of Palestine to settle upon, as their constant insistence on settling in Palestine to the exclusion of all other territories has led the state to suspect a powerful drive toward founding a strong and well-entrenched colony that threatens to upset the international balance of power."

This was not the first time that *Al-Ahram* alerted its readers to the issue of Jewish immigration to Palestine. At the beginning of the 1890s, a group of German Jews led by a man called Friedman attempted to settle on the eastern coast of the Gulf of Aqaba, then under Egyptian administration. Ottoman intervention in this matter led to a confrontation between the Ottoman and Egyptian governments. The 'Friedman crisis', as it was called, stopped the settlement.

Following the founding of the Zionist movement in 1897, European Jews renewed their attempts to settle in Palestine. In light of the ban on Jewish settlements ordered by the Ottoman Sultan, Abdel-Hamid II, the settlement attempts this time sought to take advantage of the loopholes created by corruption in the Ottoman administration.

In 1909, however, the situation was different. Abdel-Hamid II had been deposed on 27 April of that year. The secular Union and Advancement movement was in the ascendancy in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman empire. As it counted numerous Jews among its members, it was less severe in its enforcement of the former sultan's ban.

That the second Zionist conference had been convoked two years previously added a unique flavour to the situation on this occasion. This was the first time that all parties — Egyptian Jews, non-*Jewish Egyptians, the Palestinian Arabs* — revealed their positions. And *Al-Ahram*, too, would declare its stance. About a month after Abdel-Hamid II was deposed, *Al-Ahram*'s 9 June edition led with an article entitled "The Jews' search for a homeland," warning of renewed Zionist settlement activity in Palestine following the fall of the Sultan.

Five days later, an Egyptian Jew responded to the article. He accused the newspaper of discriminating between the subjects of the Ottoman state, in clear contrast to the attitude of Ottoman officials. Evidence of the official stance, he wrote, was evidenced by the meeting between the speaker of the Council of Delegates (the Ottoman parliament) and the chief rabbi. In the hour-long meeting the parliamentary chief said: "It is very much the wish of *the government that the Jews of Russia* and Romania and all the countries in which they are oppressed come to the lands of Turkey. Turkey has ample land for farming, industry and commerce and the government has faith in the loyalty and dedication of the Jews and therefore heartily welcomes Jews to settle in Turkey (the Ottoman territories)."

Al-Ahram's article and the Jewish reader's response proved a lure to all other parties to contribute their thoughts and opinions. The exchange of ideas reveals the levels of awareness of the incipient Zionist movement and its philosophy. As such, it represents an interesting chapter in the history of Israeli territorial aspirations which date back to the turn of the century.

Jack Hernstein, secretary of the so-called Party of God, wrote "The Zionist Movement: Palestine of Iraq". Appearing in *Al-Ahram* of 9 July 1909, Hernstein attempted to delineate the major trends among contemporary Jews. Among these were the orthodox Jews who adhered strictly to the traditional tenets of the faith, the assimilationists who believed that Jews should seek to merge with the societies in which they lived, and then there were the territorialists who sought to find a refuge to rescue Jews from their misery. Some Jews, he said, had opted for Uganda while others chose Iraq. All of these, he insisted, were not true Zionists, because Zionists "have not and will not deviate from their intention, prompted by an immutable goal which is to return to Palestine." He stresses the importance of distinguishing between fundamentalists and Zionists. The former "seek to establish a government within a government in order to eventually cast off the sovereign state." True Zionists, on the other hand, "seek only a patch of land as their moral, agricultural, industrial and commercial centre to serve as a refuge from the oppression and tyranny they suffer."

Hernstein's presentation, we believe, was a precise embodiment of what was *then referred to as the Zionists' policy of* "stoop to conquer." It resounded clearly during the meeting of the Jewish syndicate in Tawfiqiya during which Monsieur Mouseiri delivered a lengthy speech on the subject. According to the summary provided by *Al-Ahram*, Mouseiri expounded on the sad circumstances of Jews abroad. The solution, in his opinion, was to send them to Palestine, which they have always cherished, thereby bringing benefit both to themselves and to the country they would adopt as a homeland. "The Jews will be spared the persecution they suffer abroad and Palestine will reap the benefits of the money with which they will lift that country from its state of decay and desolation."

Mouseiri's speech provided *Al-Ahram* with an opportunity to state its position. "The Ottoman lands, covering an area six times that of France and supporting a population only half that of France, is very capable of absorbing five million Jews. However, to allow them all to settle in a single area — Palestine, the land they refer to as their promised land — is dangerous to themselves, to the people as a whole and to the state. If the Jews want power, not a single Ottoman subject would permit them that on pain of death. If, on the other hand, they seek to settle in a land where they can find comfort, happiness and prosperity, every Ottoman is willing to welcome them with open arms." The newspaper advised "our Jewish brethren in all frankness" that "it would be better for them to settle on the fallow land throughout the empire and to set as their goal settling in greater Turkey and not just Palestine."

Al-Ahram's position sparked a heated exchange of opinion on the pages of the newspaper. Speaking for the Jews were, among others, the writer Jacques Levi Tantawi and Haroun Bergmann, and for the Palestinian Arabs, particularly the Arabs of Jerusalem, were Yousef Farouji and Habib Girgis Hawa. Two Egyptians also contributed. One simply *signed himself "a Jewish teacher"*. He was so critical of the Zionist movement that one suspects that he may not have been Jewish at all. It was this writer who described the Zionist strategy of "seeking pity to seek power". The aim of the Zionist movement, he argued, was to colonise Palestine for nothing in return. Nor would the Jews be content to accept Ottoman sovereignty. If the Ottoman government took them into its fold, he asked, "would they really surrender their rights as subjects of foreign powers and request the shelter and protection of the Ottoman flag?"

Jacques Levi Tantawi's response to the teacher's letter accused *Al-Ahram* of "opposing every enterprise of importance to our sect." It saddened Tantawi that he could not refute the author's accusation that the Jews would continue to appeal for foreign protection. However, he argued, the exigency had been necessary "in order to protect ourselves, our children and our property which had been imperiled in the former era (of Abdel-Hamid II). Yet we were not the only sect to seek foreign protection. Today, however, the flag of liberty and freedom flutters and we therefore seek only the protection of the Ottoman government."

Al-Ahram's prediction that the Zionist movement would fail in its objectives added fuel to the fire. The newspaper said only very few Jews were fired by the necessary religious zeal and love for Palestine. Most Jews were preoccupied with commerce and finance. "We know none engaged in agriculture or rough manual labour. Proof of this is that the farms that have been established by Jews in Palestine have already run fallow as those that have been sent to settle the land hate working on the land and once they get enough money, they move to Cairo and Alexandria or other large cities and engage in any other occupation but agriculture."

In June 1909 worrisome news reached Egypt. The Union of American Zionists had moved to form land purchasing *companies in Americawith the purpose* of buying land in Palestine.

Yousef Farouji, a Palestinian from Jerusalem, was the next to enter the fray. He argued that the Zionist movement had two primary objectives. The first was "to promote and encourage every activity that would facilitate the purchase of land in Palestine by Jews of all classes." The second was "to pursue every avenue to secure the approval of international powers for the aspirations of the Zionist association." He concluded: "clearly this signals that the aim of the Jews in emigrating to Palestine and selecting the promised land as their destination is not merely to engage in agriculture and to innocently settle themselves on the land with no ulterior design." Proof of the existence of "various hidden motives" can be seen in the massive Jewish immigration to this city, "where there are now approximately 60,000 Jews." Further proof, he argued, can be found in their weekly magazine, *Palestina*, which covers the many agricultural and meteorological studies they have conducted, and in the numerous agricultural and industrial companies they have established. "Regardless of the many noble aims which those companies have declared for themselves, their ultimate aim is to create a secure foothold for the Jews in Palestine."

The arguments of Haroun Bergmann, a young settler in Palestine, only served to confirm Farouji's assertion. Firstly, he refutes *Al-Ahram*'s claim that Jewish-owned farms in Palestine were running fallow. As one of the inhabitants of the agricultural settlements, he could personally testify to the fact that, "although many young settlers had left due to the tyranny of the former government, the current constitution and rule of law has inspired most of those who had left to return to Palestine once more." Moreover, he said, the Russian and Romanian Jews who had come to Palestine in 1882 had founded 10 agricultural settlements, which had now increased to over 70.

Another Palestinian, Habib Girgis Hawa, presented *Al-Ahram* with a lengthy study on "The colonisation of Palestine," published on 12 July 1909. He notes ominously that "our Zionist brethren took advantage of the tyranny that then prevailed in order to forcibly wrest the title to the land in the districts of Tiberias and Safd by bribing the former rulers in order to shove the helpless farmers into prison until they agreed to sign deeds to relinquish ownership of their land." He also warned against the Zionists' tactic of offering large sums of money in order to lure peasants off the land.

He further warned: " When the Zionists gain title over the land and acquire power, their dreams of establishing an independent government will revive."

A final word in the debate was contributed by an Egyptian, Mohamed Fadel, who had previously worked as a clerk in the Tiberias religious court. His account of how the Zionists acquired land in that area clearly must have served as a harbinger for the future. "The property that the Zionist society was able to obtain in Palestine was gained through various forms of embezzlement, bribery and false testimony against those who refused to sell their land to them. The glitter of gold facilitated the Zionists' task."

It is distressing to realise that even as early as 1909, the course of the future could be predicted with such clarity.



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

A tower of learning

IN ZAHRAA, Nasr City, located on an area of 8 thousand square metres, lies Al-Alaa Modern Language Schools for Boys and Girls (Arabic/other languages, from kindergarten to secondary).

Dr Ibrahim Rafaat, chairman of the board of the schools said that Al-Alaa Modern Language Schools are equipped with the latest educational tools and equipment which aid in providing a valuable education. The schools also offer recreational areas and gardens, along with intensive classes that do not exceed 24 students per class.

Non-farm payroll

Inflation

Dow Jones

GDP

Money & Business

Egyptian products exhibition in Sarejevo

MOHAMED El-Aref Soliman, Egyptian trade commissioner, organised an official delegation to visit Bosnia to learn about the needs of the country's vital sectors.

The delegation agreed with the Bosnian side that commercial ties between the two countries need to be boosted and strengthened. The two sides also agreed to organise an Egyptian products exhibition in Sarajevo during the months of September-October, which will feature a variety of companies operating in different sectors.

NBE... a pioneering role in environment protection

ENVIRONMENT protection is no longer a luxury but a prerequisite and a lifestyle. Since environment pollutants have multiplied — resulting mainly from the activities of public business sector industrial companies which use obsolete technologies — it is now a necessity to support companies that took serious steps towards environment protection.

Out of its deep-seated belief in the importance of environment protection and its impact on public health and productivity as well as economic growth, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) signed an agreement with the German Bank for Reconstruction. Under this agreement, NBE shall represent the German Bank for Reconstruction in its DM50 million grant to finance the projects of abating the pollution resulting from the industrial public business sector's activities.

On the other hand, according to the agreement, relevant projects named by the Environmental Affairs Authority shall obtain credit facilities in the form of a non-refundable grant representing 25-50 per cent of the project's investment cost. The remaining portion is to be provided in the form of a loan extended by NBE in addition to the autonomous resources of the project. The detailed terms of the financing are as follows:

First: the terms of providing the grant

— The grant accounts for 25 per cent and 50 per cent of the investment cost with a maximum of DM3 million per project. The amount shall be determined according to the nature of each project assessed and approved by both the Environmental Affairs Authority and the German Bank for Reconstruction.

— As from the date of its approval, the grant shall be transferred into a loan in the case of the beneficiary's violation of the terms of the grant's purposes. The beneficiary shall be committed to reimburse the loan in addition to fixed commission.

Second: terms of providing the finance required for the beneficiary projects

— the remaining investment costs shall be financed by loans extended by NBE in addition to self-finance to be fixed in the light of the results of each project's credit study.

— The loan shall be reimbursed over a 3-5 year period proceeded by a grace period of one year according to the nature of each project as well as the result of the credit study.

As a matter of fact, the Environmental Affairs Authority has prepared an initial survey on both the projects to benefit from the grant and the estimated cost thereof. Such a survey would be submitted to NBE to conduct the credit study deemed necessary for the provision of the required finance.

Baltic Textile & Leather: the gateway to the Baltic and Russian markets

FOREIGN companies are finding constantly improving market opportunities in the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) whereby particular emphasis is being given to the improvement of trading relations with the countries of the European Union. As the biggest and most Western-oriented of the Baltic States, Lithuania is also banking on cooperation with Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, and the Scandinavian countries. In 1996, imports of goods into Lithuania amounted to US$4,085 million compared to US$3,404 million the year before.

The capital of Lithuania, Vilnius, is regarded as the hub for the Baltic trade and for trade with Russian and the other CIS countries. Vilnius is also the venue of the Sixth Baltic Textile & Leather, which will be held from 9-12 September 1997. This textile trade fair is a joint venture between Messe Frankfurt and the Lithuanian Light Industry Association and ranks among the most important meeting places for regional textile and leather-processing industries. At the fair, foreign suppliers find the ideal setting in which to make contacts from all over the region, as well as to prepare or expand their export business. The exhibitors, the bulk of them manufacturers from the Baltic States, the neighbouring CIS countries and Europe, will make their presentations on a total of more than 7,000 square metres of exhibition space at the Litexpo Fair Grounds. Participants are also expected from Asia and America.

74 companies from 14 countries had already registered for the Sixth Baltic Textile & Leather by the end of May. A particularly high degree of interest is being shown by Lithuanian and German companies. However, the list of exhibitors at the trade fair also shows suppliers from outside Europe, including India, Taiwan and Saudi Arabia. Udo Traeger, overseas exhibitions project manager of Messe Frankfurt, appealed to companies thinking of taking part: "Last year, the high demand from exhibiting companies meant we had to work with a waiting list several weeks before the fair. Therefore, manufacturers not wanting to miss this opportunity to break into the future of the Baltic, Russia and the other CIS countries should register in good time for this year's Baltic Textile & Leather."

The product groups of the exhibiting companies — which include textile machines and equipment, fur and leather products, household and home textiles, as well as garment fabrics — will be classified into sections in four exhibition halls. On the visitor side, the organisers expect to welcome buyer groups primarily from the Baltic region, Russia, Belorussia, other CIS countries and Scandinavia.

According to the Lithuanian Investment Agency, there has been an increase in foreign business activity in Lithuania. The opportunities for foreign companies are said to be particularly good in the textile and leather industry, which ranks among the country's most important economic sectors. The climate of investment in this Baltic state is good. Combined with the very low wage level, which has attracted numerous Western textile companies, the advantageous geographical situation and an infrastructure that is considerably more efficient than in neighbouring countries, Lithuania makes an attractive location. Furthermore, Lithuania is well-situated in terms of raw materials, has a well-trained workforce and good trading and sales relations with Russia. Foreign investors have been showing increasing interest in Lithuania since 1996. Today, over 5,000 joint ventures have been set up and are functioning there. In many cases, the companies currently being offered for privatisation are small to medium-sized companies, i.e. ideal for medium-sized foreign investors wanting to gain a foothold in the country.

The Baltic Textile & Leather fringe programme emphasises the trend character of the event. In addition to fashion shows for the coming autumn/winter and spring/summer season, the organisers are also planning a forum on current colour and garment trends. The programme of events at Baltic Textile & Leather will be rounded off by a one-day CMT seminar throwing the spotlight on the subject of sub-contracting.

Al-Ahram Weekly

The writing on the wall

Binyamin Netanyahu has earned the dubious distinction of single-handedly undermining any and all progress realised in the peace process prior to his election to office.

But more perturbing is that he is also undermining the Palestinian leadership's authority — his intransigence and blatant sidelining of the precepts of Oslo gradually chipping away at the Palestinians' confidence in their leadership.

In itself, this is a masterpiece of diplomacy — highly indicative of Netanyahu's haphazard approach to politics. It is also incredibly naive. Desperate to secure his own position in a country growing weary of the problems that have surfaced since he came to office, the Israeli premier appears hell-bent on destroying the peace process as the one way to keep his ever shaky coalition together.

But Netanyahu, desperately trying to keep all his coalition partners happy all of the time, is gambling with the very future of his country and the Israeli people, whose security he is sworn to protect. Can he be lacking in imagination to such an extent as to fail to foresee the kind of violence and instability in store if Arafat's leadership is so undermined as to become untenable, or is his power hunger and ideological zeal so overpowering as to blind him to the very real dangers that lie ahead?

Now, Israel has started arresting members of the Palestinian security bodies with which it demands "security cooperation". It is charging, moreover, that top figures in these bodies are party to plans to conduct "terror" attacks against Israeli settlers. If this is more than just a smoke screen, then Netanyahu and his advisors should be the first to read the writing on the wall.

Arafat may have staked his political career on the success of the peace process. He may have no option but to go on with that process, despite continuing humiliation at Israeli hands. But this should be no cause for comfort for Netanyahu and his clique. Arafat himself may not remain for long the Palestinians' only, or even main, option.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Chairman of the Board.......... **Ibrahim Nafie**
Editor-in-Chief.......... **Hosny Guindy**
Managing Editor.......... **Hani Shukrallah**
Assistant Editor.......... **Wadie Kirolos**
Assistant Editor.......... **Mona Anis**
Layout Editor.......... **Samir Sobhi**
General Manager for Advertising.......... **Hassan Hamdi**

Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500. Direct: 5786064
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax:5786089 /5786833
E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B IX9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

Italy
Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Banti, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

South Africa
Johannesburg: Mohamed Sabreen, Oxford Manor, 196 Oxford road-Northland 2116, Johannesburg. Tel.and Fax: (011)4477425.

Perennial calls for pruning

Calls for cuts in the US aid budget to Egypt are nothing new. How, then, should Egypt respond? Ibrahim Nafie examines the options

There has been increasing pressure within the US Congress to reduce the cost of American foreign aid with the recipients of the two largest foreign assistance programmes, Israel and Egypt, coming under particular scrutiny. Yet, since Jewish American political circles impede any encroachment upon the programme to Israel and simultaneously direct criticism against Egyptian foreign policy, it appears as though the Egyptian programme will be the one to suffer. After all, to many inside Congress, Egypt's independence, particularly when it comes to foreign policy, makes it an easy target.

Not that this is the first time aid to Egypt has come under attack. In the late 1980s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the escalating Palestinian Intifada, and the increasing influence of the Likud upon the Jewish lobby in the US, voices in Congress began to clamour for reductions in US aid to Egypt. Egypt's economic policies, in addition to allegations of human rights abuses, sure to garner sympathy within the Congress, were varyingly used as pretexts. Within a matter of months, however, Iraq invaded Kuwait. Because of Egypt's decisive stance against this aggression, the very individuals who had demanded reductions in US aid to Egypt reversed their positions. Significantly, almost as soon as the US secretary of defence had stood before Congress and announced that Egypt had joined the international alliance against Iraq, Egypt's military debts, which exceeded $7 billion, were written off.

Naturally, one has no desire for matters to reach crisis point before US-Egyptian relations are restored to normal. Yet, since it appears that campaigns attacking levels of US aid to Egypt are a perennial feature of life in Washington, Egypt should actively seek strategies to counter these campaigns.

Of central importance in a complex relationship such as that between the US and Egypt is for both sides to seek a form of consensus over their areas of difference. This is only logical given the different positions of the two countries: the US is a Western power and the only country with a global policy. It also has special relations with Israel. Egypt is a regional power, with interests in the Arab, African and Islamic worlds. Yet such differences should not overshadow the broad range of mutual interests which demand peace and regional stability, which in turn implies progress in the peace process. In this context, it is sufficient to mention that US aid to Egypt is drawn from the security component of the American budget.

Egypt and the US, it is now apparent, need to develop a more efficient mechanism for managing differences before they escalate into crises. Some US research centres have posited the idea of forming a joint political advisory committee to parallel the Presidents' Council, a body of the US-Egyptian partnership. This proposal merits exploration.

There is obviously a need to explain and clarify Egypt's position on a number of matters to the American public, not least the Egyptian stand vis-à-vis the peace process. It is also important to emphasise Egypt's regional role, and its ability to influence its neighbours, including the Palestinians. Such influence, though, is a function of Egypt's determination to ensure a just and lasting peace. It would, therefore, be foolhardy for Egypt to attempt to promote any settlement that compromised such an outcome, an outcome that can only be ensured, as Egypt has learned through its own experience, by the restoration of occupied land as a pre-condition for normalisation.

For every $200 million of American aid that comes in the form of commodities, Egypt's public and private sectors purchase over $5 billion of American products. In other words, US economic aid to Egypt does not exceed 20 per cent of the net trade imbalance. And every Egyptian who deals with an American company, or buys an American product, is sending a clear message to the US: it is in the interests of the populations of both countries to support the current relationship.

Without overplaying the possible influence of an Egyptian lobby within the US, one can still hope that Egyptians who have emigrated the US might follow the lead of the Greek, Polish, Turkish and Jewish communities in promoting bilateral relations by providing non-governmental channels for dialogue. And such dialogue can only help in promoting mutual understanding and deflating tensions before they escalate into full-blown crises.

It is particularly odd that, despite the presence of a large Egyptian American community, intellectually and socially equipped to acquaint the American public with the importance of the relationship between the two countries, this community has yet to organise any mechanisms to effectively lobby.

In conclusion we should not be too disturbed by attempts from certain quarters to undermine Egyptian-US relations. But nor should we be too complacent that a small minority of congressmen have decided to belittle the post-Camp David settlement at a time when the American Jewish community appears increasingly determined to operate as a branch of Netanyahu's government.

Clinton, from Oslo to Doha

After regarding the Palestinian problem as the core issue to be addressed by the peace process, the Clinton administration is now pinning its hopes on Arab affiliation to emerging economic globalism. Mohamed Sid-Ahmed probes the reason for the shift

Confounding expectations that he would go all out in his second term to achieve peace in the Middle East, thereby assuring himself a place in history, Clinton and his administration have remained strangely silent in the face of Netanyahu's outrageous violations of the peace process. During his first presidency, Clinton tried to take credit for any progress in the peace process, even if this had been achieved outside both the scope and knowledge of American diplomacy. A case in point was his insistence on having the Oslo Accords signed at the White House, although they had been negotiated and concluded in secret under Norway's exclusive patronage. Another was his insistence on having the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty signed in Washington as well.

But the Clinton administration's hands-on approach to the Middle East peace process changed drastically after his reelection to a second term. The shuttle diplomacy which brought former Secretary of State Warren Christopher to the region whenever the peace process was faced with a crisis, however minor, has been completely abandoned by his successor, Madeleine Albright, even though the process is now facing a crisis of unprecedented gravity. Several theories have been put forward to explain this paradox. Among the more fanciful is that Christopher's frequent visits to the Middle East were undertaken at the urging of influential presidential advisers who saw this as a way of diverting Christopher's attention from more sensitive files — a ploy that is unlikely to work with his wily successor. Another theory is that Clinton is avoiding a showdown with Netanyahu, and hence with the American Jewish lobby, to ensure Al Gore's victory in the forthcoming presidential elections. This second theory also lacks credibility, not only because Gore is known to be even more pro-Israeli than Clinton, but also because it is unlikely that Clinton would pass up a chance to carve himself a place in history out of friendship and loyalty for his vice-president.

However, the hypothesis that the Clinton administration is adopting a low profile on Arab-Israeli affairs was shaken by two major events last week. One was Madeleine Albright's announcement that her first ever visit to the Middle East as secretary of state will be to head the American delegation to the Economic Conference scheduled to be held in Doha, Qatar, next November with the participation of an important Israeli delegation. The other was the resolution passed by the United Nations General Assembly concomitantly with Ms Albright's announcement, which called for "strongly discouraging the activities that directly contribute to the construction and development of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem." An overwhelming majority voted for the resolution; only three — Israel, the United States and Micronesia — voted against and 14 abstained. The resolution highlighted how deep the gap has become between the international community's perception of Israeli politics and that of Washington which, according to Ms Albright's statement, is making attendance of the Doha conference a condition for US friendship and support for this or that Arab party in the future.

It is worth recalling that President Clinton's first direct experience with the Middle East conflict in his first term in office was through the Palestinian problem, thanks to the signature of the Oslo Accords in Washington. Even if, as some have argued, these accords did not respond to Palestinian aspirations satisfactorily, the fact that they were signed in the White House was an implicit acknowledgement of the centrality of the Palestinian problem. In his second term, Clinton is singling out 'economic globalism', not the Palestinian problem, as the central element in reactivating the peace talks. This is a totally different approach. Building up a Middle East common market is part of the multilateral track mechanism established by the Madrid conference for the purpose of consolidating the bilateral track which dealt with the key land-for-peace tradeoff. To consider that the presence in Doha of an Israeli delegation side by side with the various Arab parties signals the resumption of the peace negotiations, even though the bilateral talks are stalled on all fronts, is simply to place a subsidiary issue before the core issue, thus reorienting the direction and, indeed, reconsidering the very purpose, of the peace process.

The American stand seems to be based on the assumption that most Arab regimes would rather see Israel than any other Middle East power, whatever its oil assets and however close it may be to Washington, acting as a broker in guaranteeing their affiliation to the new mechanisms of economic globalism. According to this scenario, the Palestinian problem is regarded as an impeding factor to be overcome and a time bomb to be de-fused. However, the assumption has already proved to be off the mark. For example, the desecration of Islamic holy places in Jerusalem touches a very sensitive nerve in Saudi Arabia, which has already announced that it will not take part in the Doha conference and that it will do everything in its power to undermine it.

In the face of this American-Israeli challenge, Arab parties should adopt a more cohesive stand. So far they have failed to do so. Doha is resisting Arab calls, particularly from Damascus, to call off the conference, at least in the present circumstances, under the pretext that it is being subjected to untenable American pressure. Cairo has announced that it is deferring its final decision on Doha to the Arab League meeting of foreign ministers in September. Whatever the differences between them, Arab parties must understand that the Doha conference is not meant to be just another economic conference along the lines of those previously convened in Casablanca, Amman and Cairo, but the symbol of a fundamental reorientation of the Middle East negotiations, where the Arab territory occupied by Israel will no longer be regarded by the latter as its main bargaining chip, but as an asset to be voluntarily abandoned by the former as a commission!

Command culture

By Naguib Mahfouz

Prior to 1952 everybody was free to write if they wished, publish a magazine, or produce a film. The July revolution introduced organised culture, beginning with the creation of the Higher Council for Culture and the Arts. This was followed by the Story Club, the Theatre Sector, the Book Organisation and the Cinema Organisation.

More important still was the formation of the Ministry of Culture itself. Budgets were set for each of these organisations, enabling them to step up production once they had achieved the yearly planning objective established for each organisation.

As is the case with everything that is organised, however, cultural production was controlled to a certain extent, and culture and the arts came under state control.

Certainly, some criticism was permitted, and that is why I described culture and the arts as being controlled to a certain extent, not entirely controlled.

I consider that one of the revolution's greatest achievements was the creation of the City of Arts (Medinat El-Funoun), which was later combined with the Academy of Arts and all the specialised institutes related to it. The arts were, for the first time, taught scientifically, and numerous specialised cultural magazines were published more than ever before.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

It happened one July

Al-Ahram: "The July 1952 revolution continues to be a subject of debate. Views on the revolution vary between the enthusiastic and the sceptic ... A great number of memoirs have been written, but most lack objectivity. It is not fair, in my opinion, to assess the July revolution only from the perspective of the 1967 defeat, the so-called 'intelligence services-state', 'the excesses' of the Military Prison or 'arbitrary' sequestration. The revolution's major achievements, such as the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, the construction of the High Dam, placing Egypt on the world map at the forefront of a massive world-wide political movement, the launching of key industries and the introduction of free education should also be taken into account. I might conclude by quoting the late columnist Ahmed Bahaa El-Din: 'By all means let us open the file of the July revolution, so long as we open all the files.'"
(Mustafa El-Fiqi, 19 July)

Akhbar El-Yom: "Gamal Abdel-Nasser was the first Egyptian to challenge the Mohamed Ali dynasty through deeds and not words. This alone would have guaranteed him a place in history. Abdel-Nasser was the first Egyptian to rule Egypt after centuries of suffering under foreign rulers ... I was imprisoned during the Nasser era and was beaten by prison officers... but my experience will remain insignificant when contrasted with the bright side of the July revolution. All events of our time will fade away except for two days: the July revolution and the 6 October War."
(Mahmoud El-Saadani, 19 July)

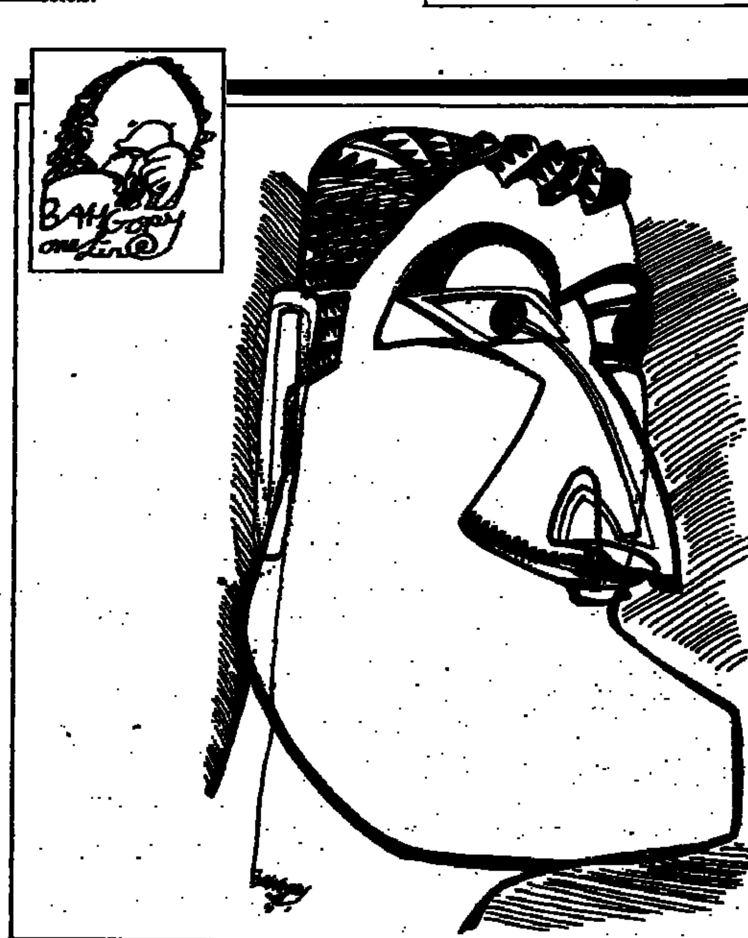
October: "Were the past 45 years insufficient to reveal all the stories and secrets of the revolution? They were more than sufficient, but the problem is that the assessment of Nasser and the revolution has turned into a puzzle. Nothing logical is ever said about either. Opinions about Abdel-Nasser are based solely on emotion. He is either depicted as a tyrant or a saint. The voices of those who regard him as a human being with virtues and failings are being drowned by the partisans' clamour."
(Atef Abdel-Ghani, 20 July)

Al-Wafd: "The stances taken by the US show without doubt that it has failed the Arabs and is implementing a plan to damage their cause morally and materially. The US will not be deflected from this course by mollifying words from the Arabs. It knows that it holds all the cards and that Europe can do very little for the Arabs. The US knows that the Arabs dare not offend it."
(Sanaa El-Said, 20 July)

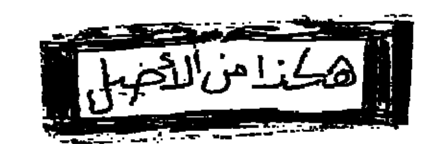
Al-Arabi: "What is left of the revolution, 45 years on? What is the final verdict if the rights of workers and farmers are endangered, if the US lords us about and if Israel, having obtained an embassy in Cairo and representatives in the Arab world, demands total surrender? ... There is a battle over Egypt and who rules it and over who controls the resources of the Arab nation. There is a battle between the poor who want a share of the pie and those who want to monopolise power and wealth. There is a battle between those who want independence for their country and those who want dependence. There is a battle between national industries and commercial agents and brokers. There is a battle between those who wish to surrender to Israeli hegemony and those who believe Palestine is the responsibility of all Arabs."
(Galal Aref, 21 July)

Rose El Youssef: "Under the current circumstances, the only use of the Doha summit would be to relieve Israel's isolation under Netanyahu. To attend the conference would be to let down the 131 countries which voted in favour of a UN General Assembly resolution condemning Israel's settlement policy and urging UN member states to 'discourage' activities contributing to the building of settlements on occupied Arab land, particularly in Jerusalem. Following such an international show of outrage, the Arabs would look ludicrous if they initiate economic cooperation with Israel."
(Mahmoud El-Thomas, 21 July)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



Every year, 23 July celebrations revolve around a group of symbolic figures. Gamal Abdel-Nasser and the Free Officers are still the icons of the revolution. I gave President Nasser piercing eyes, glinting with hope: eyes looking into the future with optimism and faith. The strong lines of his eyebrows, nose and jaw, as well as the long neck, all express the determination he instilled in Egyptians when he encouraged them to "lift up your heads, my brothers..."



Close up

Salama A. Salama

The magic wand

A few years ago, very few people in Egypt were aware of ecological problems. Apparently, someone overheard a discussion about ecology, so he joined in, saying: "Thank God, we *all* come from a good environment!" He was referring, of course, to the impeccable background of all concerned.

At the time, it seemed that Egypt's growing ecological problems would go on being treated haphazardly, in other words whenever a crisis occurred, causing considerable damage. In the past ten years, however, ecological problems have developed into issues of global concern. Policy-makers in industrialised nations realised that they could not live in a clean climate, manufacture clean products, breathe clean air or eat healthy food unless they could ensure healthy regional and global environments.

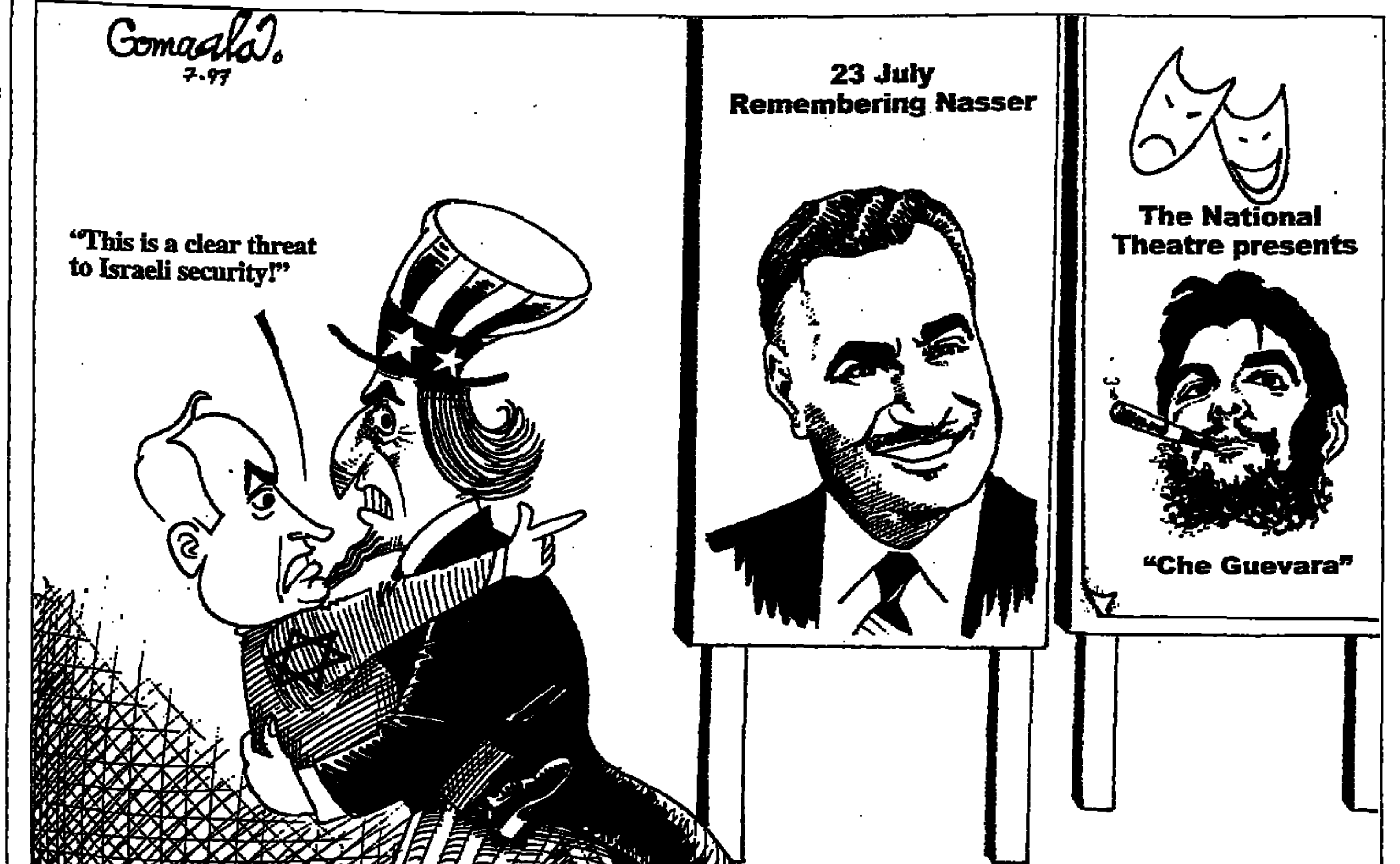
It is from this realisation that the "one world" slogan, now such a catchword, was born. It reflected a growing awareness that no nation or group of nations, no matter how powerful or how technologically advanced, can raise barriers to cut off the less developed world. Nobody can stop the wind, block the course of rivers, stop up water sources, control the waves or halt the growth of trees and plants. When the outbreak of mad cow disease occurred, the European countries, in spite of all the scientific and medical facilities at their disposal, were unable to prevent the spread of the disease. Preventing the distribution, sale and consumption of contaminated meat was only achieved with the greatest difficulty.

Because of its geographical and cultural position, Egypt is necessarily involved in any international effort or new cultural trend. It is not strange, therefore, that Egypt was one of the first Arab nations to sign international agreements on environmental preservation and sustainable development; nor is it astonishing that it took the lead in applying measures aimed at preserving the environment. Since the promulgation of the 1994 Environment Law in the face of strong resistance from those who seek to promote ignorance in Egypt, large sections of the public have developed sensible ways for reversing the damage done to our lives as a result of negligence, ignorance or repeated errors.

Undoubtedly, we in Egypt are only at the beginning of the road. We still debate environmental issues with the logic and concepts popular in the '70s, at the first international conference on the environment (held in 1972). This is only to expected, since the environmental issues we face in the late '90s are the same issues faced by Europe in the seventies. Many believe that establishing an institution to control environmental degradation will reverse all the damage we have caused by dumping waste into our water reserves and pumping pollutants into the air.

We continue to believe in this magic wand although it has become eminently clear that environmental issues are directly related to widespread public awareness, and that they are in fact inextricably linked to the right to information, as well as political and economic justice.

What we must remember on World Environment Day, celebrated recently, is that the road ahead of us is long.



Soapbox

Jerusalem off limits

International law stipulates that occupation of land does not imply the transfer of sovereignty to the occupying force. This rule derives from the United Nations Charter (paragraph 4 of Article 2), which requires that the member states refrain from threats to use force and the actual use of force in their international relations. The military occupation of the territories of another state, therefore, is not recognised as legal. This was explicitly stipulated by United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967 concerning all the Arab territories, including East Jerusalem, occupied by Israel following its attack of 5 June 1967.

East Jerusalem, therefore, as part of the occupied Arab territories, is not under Israeli sovereignty.

The exchange of diplomatic representation between states signifies the mutual recognition of their sovereignty under international law. A diplomatic mission normally lies in territory under the sovereignty of the concerned state, usually the capital of that state. The suggestion to transfer the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to occupied Jerusalem implies the recognition of occupied Jerusalem as part of Israel. This act is a violation of international law. If the transfer is effected, it will constitute a violation of UN resolutions, which the US is committed to respect and implement.

The possibility that the US will implement the transfer, therefore, is detrimental to its role in the peace process. It undermines efforts toward a settlement in the region as well as the credibility and objectivity of the American role. Furthermore, it supports Israel in its intransigence, and encourages it to obstruct peace negotiations.

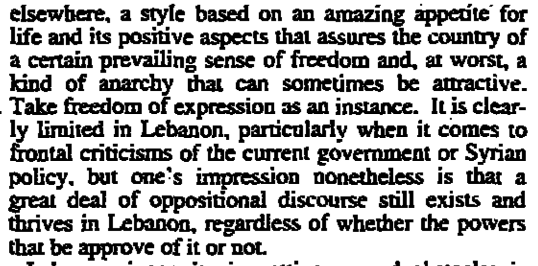


Ibrahim El-Enani

This week's Soapbox speaker is the dean of the Faculty of Law at Ain Shams University.

Return to Lebanon

Edward Said learns lessons in renewed optimism, private initiative and public failure. As Beirut rushes towards recovery, appetite and frustration mingle in almost equal parts



Anyone arriving in Beirut today after an absence of some years will be amazed at the feverish pace of recovery that is everywhere apparent. Hundreds of new buildings have sprung up alongside charred, bullet- and shell-defaced hulks; the streets bustle with pedestrians and are crammed with dozens of new boutiques, well-stocked with luxury goods from abroad; traffic is extremely dense, with far too many cars and far too few regulations; the old downtown area, now completely razed, is the site of what appears to be an enormous area of reconstruction, all of it under the control of Solidere, Prime Minister Hariri's gigantic company that seems to be the country's main investor and employer.

A vast population of poorer citizens flanks the city with scant hope for better days, while the shrinking middle class battles its way to daily bread with greater and greater difficulty. Despite its amazing vitality, Lebanon is going through a serious economic and, I think, spiritual depression caused by its relatively powerless position between Israel and Syria and the awful, as yet unresolved burden of its destructive civil war. As one result among many, investment and growth are severely limited; governmental expenditure — the prodigious disbursement of which is the prime minister's principal policy — is producing a greater and greater debt, which requires more of the economy's resources to service, and the basic problems remain unattended to. Having just spent ten days in Beirut, I was struck by the over-all mood of frustration and uncertainty lurking just beneath the busy surface of a quotidian reality that remains the Arab world's most lively and dashing.

Still, Lebanon's almost animal energy is indeed something to marvel at in an Arab world sunk in gloom and sullen discontent. For good reason, since there has rarely been a period in our modern history so bereft of a popular movement of resistance and secular reform as now. All the leaders seem tacitly agreed that what we need is some push from the outside, some bold new American initiative to quell Netanyahu's overweening arrogance and power, and open up a new door to revived peace negotiations. The slightest reflection reveals, however, that a) American initiatives are unlikely when Israel and the US hold all the strategic options and are disinclined simply to give them up or genuinely modify them when there is no real need or pressure to do so.

States like Syria, which oppose Israeli-US hegemony but lack the real power to hurt it, regrettably end up classified as pariah or terror states, and pushed further away from any ongoing dialogue that might induce some change. And, b) reliance on some outside, perhaps even magical solution provokes more frustration and uncertainty; far from releasing us from anxiety, more of it is provoked, along with a sense of greater helplessness than usual. But as I said a moment ago, Lebanon is unlike most other Arab states caught in this fix, despite the fact that, as the smallest and most vulnerable to outside pressures, it has considerably less margin for manoeuvre or initiative.

There is a style about Lebanon that doesn't exist elsewhere, a style based on an amazing appetite for life and its positive aspects that assures the country of a certain prevailing sense of freedom and, at worst, a kind of anarchy that can sometimes be attractive. Take freedom of expression as an instance. It is clearly limited in Lebanon, particularly when it comes to frontal criticisms of the current government or Syrian policy, but one's impression nonetheless is that a great deal of oppositional discourse still exists and thrives in Lebanon, regardless of whether the powers that be approve of it or not.

Lebanese ingenuity in getting around obstacles is legendary, but no Arab society is as resourceful in somehow surmounting obstacles and legal threats. On a per capita basis Lebanon has the largest press in the Arab world, more radio and television stations, more parties and blocs than is imaginable elsewhere; this is really impossible to control, so sheer pluralism provides many opportunities to say what one wants. A Palestinian friend who came to Beirut from Ramallah told me that, in the dreary environment provided by Israel and the Palestinian Authority, more and more Palestinians are looking to Lebanese joie de vivre as a model for their depressing problems. It is true that, except for the very poor in Lebanon (their number is increasing, alas) no Arab country provides such a range of amusements, restaurants, fancy shops, beach resorts and the like for one and all. So, I was told, Palestinians driven into indifference and frustration find Lebanese hedonism a possible new inspiration.

At present in the Mashriq only Beirut and Cairo could be described as offering the pleasures and real culture of city life — crowds, an open sense of bustle and engagement, a sense of cultural pride in the city's past, its traditions, literature, mythology and popular habits. One of the things I have long thought was generally missing in contemporary Arab culture was a serious interest in two of the great themes of modernity, namely pleasure and desire. I may be wrong about this absence, but what is striking about Beirut and Cairo is that both cities offer opportunities for those things which are otherwise banned or regulated in most Arab capitals.

There is something unforgivably austere about the lack of democracy that imposes itself on a city's spirit, which very much diminishes the pleasure (and adds to the fear) of being in places that chafe under the threat, real or imagined, of religious fundamentalism; both Beirut and Cairo have such groups in them, but so far as I can tell superficially, these extremists haven't intimidated café culture, the theatre, cinema or the literary intelligentsia to anything like the degree one might have expected. Certainly the attempt a few years ago on Naguib Mahfouz's life had the effect of making religious politics of that kind more, rather than less, repellent.

Having lived abroad for so many years and having necessarily become a traveller much of the time, I find it appropriate to speak of a city's spirit, rather than only of its population, area, history, and so forth, all of them factually important but ultimately insufficient when one wishes to grapple with what it is that gives a city its special identity. Beirut in many ways has a miraculous spirit, its people full of unextinguished hope and generosity of a kind that, once again except for Cairo, I have not encountered elsewhere. But Beirut is unlike Cairo in that it fronts on the most romantic and richest of all seas, and has created its identity out of a unique engagement between inland mountain and harbour-like coast. No one who has grown up near the Mediterranean can ever evade its mystical pull, and no one fails to experience in its poetry (e.g. Cavafy) the unusual blend of past and present, permanence and change, beauty and ugliness that captures all its natives. This is all undeniably present in Beirut, which the long years of civil war have not extinguished.

And yet the war is still present, though unacknowledged. Few countries have gone through so harrowing an ordeal, and none has ever adequately dealt with so destructive a past. In South Africa the new government established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission headed by Bishop Desmond Tutu; its precise role was to expose the ravages of apartheid in order to understand and finally overcome them. There has not been such a process in Lebanon, partly because the country's energies are dedicated to reconstruction and partly because it is easier to avoid the past meticulously.

Where this attitude is, in my view, particularly objectionable is in dealing with the presence of almost 450,000 Palestinians, refugees from Israel's destructive policies and the remainder of those people who were involved in the civil war under Arafat. Sabra and Shatila are still there, mournful reminders of a horrible genocidal episode, but it is today's Palestinians in Lebanon — abandoned by their leadership, cynically exploited by Arab politicians, left in a state of uncertainty and insecurity — who today live Lebanon's tragedy in one of its most acute forms. To speak of them as "forgotten" is of course to forget them, to see them only as a problem, rather than as the living actuality of all that is wrong with the contemporary Middle East. Unless humane decisions are made to give Lebanon's Palestinians some form of secure residency with normal working and travelling conditions, we shall be allowing our own passivity and frustration to get the better of us. I recommend that everyone concerned with the charade of peace read as a lesson in reality Rosemary Sayegh's excellent, profoundly moving book *Too Many Enemies*, which deals with the concrete difficulties of Palestinian refugee life today.

I was in Beirut two weeks ago for a wonderful occasion that did me great honour, a conference on critical culture that was also meant to recognise whatever it is that I have done as a critical intellectual. It was an embarrassing and also extremely rich experience for me for at least two reasons. First, because it was taking place in Beirut at a time when many people's pessimism had given up on creation and productivity. That such an occasion could have taken place in Beirut testified to the city's immense warmth and cultural vivacity, despite the depredations of the past two decades and the stagnation of modern Middle Eastern actualities. Second, because the studies and papers presented at the conference were on such a high level, and because most of the participants were Arab, I had a new sense of optimism for the future of Arab culture generally, and for the capacity of its gifted members to engage in critical dialogue with the rest of the world. I have never felt so honoured and gratified at the same time.

In the interests of constructive criticism, it appears to be necessary, however, to add one last, perhaps discordant, note. What is so undeniably impressive about Beirut is not just the rapid pace of reconstruction, but the terrible damage being done to nature in one of the most beautiful spots in the whole Middle East. One can blame many things on imperialism, but surely the Arab assault upon the natural environment is not one of them.

We have a rich past, a rich present and in the long run a hopeful future; yet everywhere one goes in the Arab world, ugly buildings, defaced monuments, and inhumane urban centres are expanding with scarcely any restraint. In the relentless pursuit of profit, no one seems to pay any attention to the unhealthiness — in all senses of the word — of the world we are building with our own hands.

In Beirut, the splendid beaches are all polluted beyond repair, and the mountains have been turned into heaps of dreadful little tenements whose purpose seems to be more ostentatious than restful. What we still lack is a proper citizens' movement that not only protests the tortures and censorship that disfigure our political life, but also the public and private attack on our very scarce natural resources. Critical culture is inseparable from citizenship: only if one participates in the building of a society and a city can one be actively be involved in the building of culture.

Lebanon is a lesson in private initiative and public failure. The potential is still there, but it must be redirected to ourselves and the physical surroundings that can either nourish or choke us.

Understanding July

The 1952 revolution, writes **Osama El-Ghazali Harb**, has been cause for jubilation and despair. But what have we learned? Almost half a century on, is an objective evaluation possible?

Forty-five years on, people still disagree over how to assess the revolution of 23 July 1952. To some it was a populist, progressive, anti-colonial revolution, a quantum leap forward for Egyptian society. Others have described it as a fascist-style coup, the cause of Egypt's humiliation and defeat at the hands of foreign powers, an about-face in the course of the nation's history. This sharp contradiction in evaluations of the 1952 revolution reflects not only the multiple, often contradictory effects of this landmark event on Egyptian and Arab history, but also the profound emotional, psychological and ideological factors connected with it.

While the 1952 revolution hailed the beginning of a 'true' democracy that would supplant the monarchy/formalistic democracy controlled by the dominant classes which had alienated the people, it did not succeed in offering an alternative form of democratic rule. Instead, it abolished the 1923 Constitution, prohibited political parties and severely curbed freedoms of opinion and expression. It also rejected the 'outmoded' model of economic growth based on the activities of Egyptian and foreign capitalists, supplanting this system with an enormous 'public sector' aimed at furnishing goods and services to the underpirivileged classes at affordable prices. The performance of the public sector, however, quickly deteriorated and proved incapable of making a tangible contribution to economic progress in Egypt. In fact, it soon became clear that economic progress demanded the maximum reduction of the public sector.

The July revolution raised the banners of peasants' and workers' rights and, indeed, succeeded in giving an enormous boost to the morale of the lower classes, instilling them with a sense of their value as human beings with equal rights. Unfortunately, this lasted only a few years, after which the conditions of the peasantry began to deteriorate again so that, with the spread of illiteracy and extensive deprivation, millions were compelled to migrate abroad in search of their livelihood. The same applies to accomplishments in public health, housing and education. The initial years of the revolution saw the spread of public health clinics, lowered rents and free education. Yet all these institutions quickly degenerated and became additional focal points for many of the chronic problems that still afflict Egypt today.

Of course, any assessment of the revolution must take into account such irrefutable victories as the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, the construction of the High Dam and the enhancement of Egypt's status as a leader of the Arab and Third worlds. The revolution, however, also dragged Egypt into the worst military defeat in its contemporary history — the 1967 debacle, still an open wound for millions of Egyptians.

This combination of major achievements and horrendous failures is not the only cause for the vast disparity in opinion in evaluating the revolution. Conflicting emotional, psychological and ideological attitudes also play a fundamental role.

While, for example, 'agrarian reform' rallied the support and ardour of millions of farmers and the rural poor, it sparked a smouldering bitterness among the former wealthy classes whose property was confiscated and whose leaders were ostracised. Although millions of middle-class Egyptians rejoiced at the collapse of the old pro forma democracy, which had brought them nothing, the majority of the intelligentsia became increasingly wary of the anti-democratic orientation of the revolution.

Indeed, the lengthy prison sentences and constant police harassment to which many members of this class were subjected were symptomatic of a chronically problematic relationship between the revolution and civil society.

While millions of the lower and lower-middle classes were eager to affiliate themselves with a system that enabled them to satisfy their material aspirations through the provision of a panoply of inexpensively-priced commodities, the many business entrepreneurs whose companies and factories had been nationalised harboured only rancour for a regime that confiscated their money, appropriated their property and forced many to flee the country.

Similarly, Arabs outside Egypt find it difficult to comprehend the reservations which many Egyptians express with regard to Gamal Abdel-Nasser and his style of government. After all, the Arabs only felt the emotive impact of Nasser's pan-Arab, anti-colonialist and anti-Zionist rhetoric. They never had to experience firsthand the results of his domestic policies.

In spite of this complex interplay between psychological factors and the historical events set into motion by the Egyptian revolution, it should still be possible to develop an objective evaluation of this important turning point in Egyptian history. It is insufficient to say that the July revolution brought both advantages and disadvantages. Such equivocation is false objectivity and does little by way of deriving lessons for the future. Rather, we should pose specific questions; Why did the July revolution take the course or courses it did? Were there better alternatives available, given the circumstances that prevailed at the time? What lessons can we draw from all this?

In answering these questions, it is essential that we remain rigorous in employing scientific, objective criteria. In other words, we must apply ourselves to the processes of empirical analysis, not in order to affirm or refute psychological or ideological biases, but, rather, to learn to avert the pitfalls to which the revolution succumbed. Only then can we build a better future for our country, based on worthwhile sacrifices for the sake of tangible achievements, not emotive ideological slogans that dull our senses and signify nothing.

The writer is editor-in-chief of the quarterly journal, Al-Siyassa Al-Dawlia (International Politics), issued by Al-Ahram.

The great outdoors

David Blake goes horsey

The Egyptian Folkloric Dance Company; Open Air Theatre; Cairo Opera House; 14 July

In the air, high above the Cairo Opera House gardens, hang freshly minted musical tones. They stay a bit, then sheer off into eternity: sounds from the Opera House and its two open air spaces.

A Chinese lady, visiting Cairo from Beijing for a month, announced after a few days that she had to return home because there were no gardens in Cairo in which to take a walk. Sadly, she is almost right, but not quite.

Cairo now has its own Opera gardens. If these gardens can become a protected area for trees, there is hope that the city will be saved from the onslaught of the juggernaut which threatens to turn it into a gardenless wilderness. Cairo's municipal authorities, unfortunately, have no great love of trees. They don't even chop trees down, but massacre them, tear them apart.

Thankfully, though, the Opera gardens have for some reason become sacrosanct. They survive immaculate and undesecrated. One lung at least to breathe with and a cool green garden eye with which to see.

So don't go home to Beijing Chinese lady, stay, look and take an evening walk through the Opera gardens when the Opera offers musical evenings in the two al fresco theatres.

The first folkloric show of the summer came on 14 July in the Cairo Opera open air space. The space is beautiful and so are the surrounding arcades looking into it. It forms a square like a swimming pool without water. The acoustics are good; mere breezes do not disturb the sound flow. A wind might chase sounds into tricky flights but not chaos as happens in the hills of the Citadel. Overhead the planes are now silenced, friendly blinking migratory birds, and even the mayhem on Tahrir Street can be seen but not heard.

The Folkloric Dance Company is a new branch stemming from the larger folkloric festival that has come into being over the last few years. It was big, brash, full of colour and unashamed village näiveté. There were entire groups from the various governorates of Egypt, plenty of singing and unabashed enjoyment and physicality in the dancing. There were small side shows, dramas, some by the seashore, war stories from 1967, the Battle of Port Said and desert wanderings. There were last minute efforts at decor and the costuming was as brilliant as the performers.

Now all this has changed. We have grown sophisticated. Cairo and its hordes don't care much for farm life, love-in-the-sticks has no appeal, and history soon gets forgotten. We must amuse, says this new Folkloric, but the take comes from another angle. The audience moves a step down and crosswise into tourist land, cabaret and nightclub. Clean, without anything snide, is the suggestion.

It's a nice show but devoid of the dash and personality the old folk shows had. No farms please. There is a lot of bottom, but no belly. Everything is well clothed, in fact, splendidly dressed, in tasteful colours — a blend of couture with a dash of brightness here and there but not a trace of vulgarity.

This is not really on. Vulgarity is absolutely essential in any theatre show, whether Brecht, Shakespeare, or down on the farm. Vulgarity adds sauce to the dish, the taste and emotion. A violinist in a Beethoven concerto must have a dash of vulgarity or the thing falls flat.

Never was there so much bottom waggle as in this show. Man and girl waggled, thrust and confronted the audience with bottom, but it might have been the sleepwalking scene from Macbeth for the emotion aroused.

The opening number set the scene. Boys and girls, green-topped shirts, white skirts and pants. There is flirting and flouncing. He displays, she rejects. Then they get together. The music throughout is recorded; there is no actual singing. When the voice blares out, the dancers expertly mime words and meaning. But it is not the same as a real voice, however inadequate. Then three flutes came, the lovely, noisy ones, relics of real folkloric sounds, actual and thrusty. Three tall men in *galabiyas* of smoky black material. They are real and their shrieking sounds too, so the sound is right for dance numbers. They're partnered by drums and percussion: real players.

Dance follows dance. For the men a wrestling dance. All are tall, one lamp-post high and springy. He will appear throughout this show, and looks very rural, which is fine.

The costumes grow more and more beautiful. The show settles into girls and then into boys — not much co-education here. A big ensemble does, however, bring the sexes together and turns into the Chandelier-on-the-head dance. It looks very splendid with the girls swaying and undulating serpent-like as the headgear wobbles. Will one fall off? Never. But the candles, even though fitted for electricity, never come on. No flashes up top to bring the ensemble to an end.

As the ballets and scenes continue, they grow more and more distant. Apart from the genuine flute group all the sound is canned. We were given much bottom activity of supreme dignity. A group of girls dressed as flowers and others as cherry trees looked like magical sirens from Klingsor's *Parsifal* garden. The colours really shone and flashed. The temperature began to rise.

And then it happened. The show took on its own personality. A girl leads a very tall horse on to the stage. No fooling; it's a genuine circus horse made of two tall men, one the front legs; the other the hind. They are fitted out as horse, a large one with magnificent stature. It is led into the centre of the theatre area, spot-lit, and greets the cheering audience with dignity. Forget the circus. This horse is a nag of destiny: Pegasus or the Horse of Troy. The flutes bray, the horse then does a full ballet of greeting to the audience, weaving between his court of dancers into the audience itself, picking his way through the throng of admiring children who embrace him. Everything about him, bridle, bit, reins, and head gear is of the utmost refinement, and then, sparked by that touch of circus irony which places him into a poem, he prances up in the shadows of the arches of the balcony and finally trots down the steps to acknowledge the real warmth of the audience. This dappled grey, dressed in Matisse colours, was the hit of the evening. He gave the folkloric its folk, and his legs, when the two boys peeled off the head and the hind quarters, had the reception of the evening. It must have been a hell of heat in there under all that felt and finery. Let's not lose this horse but have him back again to put ginger into another folkloric party.

Only a horse can steal the show

Theatre

Old haunts

The day Che Guevara's remains were discovered in Bolivia, **Nehad Selaiha** found him stalking the boards of the National

Isam Nagati is definitely a very lucky young man. It was positively uncanny that the opening of his production of Mikhail Roman's *The Night the Great Guevara Was Killed* (his debut as a director at the National) should be heralded, on the very same day, with the news of the discovery of the hero's remains in some unknown grave in Bolivia 30 years after his capture and execution. Although I knew that Nagati had chosen the text over six months ago, and that his choice had been part of National's plan to revive the dramatic heritage of the sixties through young directors, I was, nevertheless, overtaken by a momentary feeling of awe as I shook hands with him at the gates of the theatre.

Roman, who, in one aspect of his complex, often paradoxical and teasingly enigmatic personality, was a socialist, wrote this play under the impact of a dual shock: the devastating defeat of the Egyptian army in 1967 and the death of the idealised and idolised Guevara in October of the same year. The play appeared at the National during the '68-'69 season in a production by Karam Metaweh with Mahmoud Yaseen in the title role, but the text evidences a much earlier date of composition. At the time it was regarded not just as a threnody and a panegyric for the man described by Jean-Paul Sartre as 'the most complete human being of our age', but also as a much-needed morale-raiser for a defeated nation. It did not matter if few could make dramatic sense of the characters, setting or situation projected on stage, find any thematic coherence in its wild verbal avalanche, or detect any logic in its abrupt and startling shifts of mood and tone. The virulent invective against the US and all imperialist powers and reactionary regimes and the genuine sense of anguished disillusionment and desperate resistance touched a responsive chord in the audience then and proved cathartic. Roman had obviously written it in the heat of the moment, so to speak, and it bore all the marks of a work written with passionate speed, without dramatic planning or deliberation, as 'an overflow of powerful emotion', to quote Wordsworth. Inevitably, something of Roman's deep-seated ambivalence went into it, and very often the fiery revolutionary rhetoric suddenly and quite disconcertingly gives way to existential despair or religious resignation. Often the image of Christ is superimposed on Guevara, while the representative of the imperialist powers, or more precisely of the American ogre, takes on satanic proportions. At such moments, one realises, despite the expressionistic facade, the presence of the chorus, and the layers of abstruse verbiage, that, stylistically, *The Night the Great Guevara Was Killed* belongs essentially to the genre of the medieval morality play. Indeed, Guevara's final affirmation of faith and hope despite his defeat and his honest acknowledgement of human frailty and fickleness transforms his execution into a sacrificial death — a crucifixion.

Thirty years on, after the collapse of communism, and now that the legend of Guevara has somewhat faded, it is difficult to recapture the fervour and enthusiasm the play inspired in the late sixties. The revolutionary rhetoric sounds facile, hollow and outdated and the call for continuous armed struggle, guerrilla warfare and martyrdom positively menacing. Isam Nagati's choice of the play, despite its glaring structural faults, was evidently inspired by the growing frustration and anger of the Arabs at the deadlock in the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks and at what they perceive as US apathy and bias in favour of Israel. The text was slightly adapted to underline this new context and a number of songs were added to drive the point home. The adaptation, however, neglected to take into account the ideological complexity of the current Arab scene, its many cross-currents and conflicting sympathies, and failed to tone down the blatant sexism of most of the dialogue. The unfortunate result, perhaps unforeseen by the director and his crew, was to simplify the play even further and orient it in the direction of militant Islamic fundamentalism. Guevara's call for a continuous revolution bore a frightening resemblance to the Islamists' call for *jihad*. It was a painful irony since the first production to attract the critics' attention to Nagati's talents as a director was an adaptation of Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* in which the image of the bearded, grotesquely ferocious fundamentalist replaced the metaphor of the rhino.

But artistically, and apart from the worrying message it involuntarily puts across, the production was generally modest and had few virtues. These consisted mainly in Khalil Mursi's performance of the satanic personification of the powers of evil, which was deliciously and quite appropriately sceptical and flippant, and Mohamed Nooh's music. For the rest, Hisham Gomaa's set was inordinately cluttered and painful to the eye, Diana Calenti's choreography was positively naive and conventional, Khalid El-Isawi as Guevara was too pallid, and Manal Zaki's personification of the 'red revolution' was marred by her voluptuous contours, skin-tight, revealing scarlet evening dress and high-heeled, glittering shoes. One had hoped for a less luscious revolution.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Valparaiso
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, Alexandria annex, 101 El-Horreya Avenue, Alexandria.
An exhibit of lithographs, postcards and photographs.

Mehab El-Sayed (Paintings)
Ragheb Seddiq Hall, Cairo Atelier, 2 Karim El-Dawla St, Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 6pm-10pm. Until 30 July.

Ibrahim Abdel-Hamid Manis (Paintings)
Cairo Atelier, 2 Karim El-Dawla St, as above. Until 31 July.

Art for All
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 5pm-10pm. Until 31 July.
Works by Mohamed El-Nagdi, Abu Bakr El-Nawawi, Galal El-Hosseiny, Gihan Raouf and others, celebrating the birth of the Prophet Mohamed.

Hamdi Ateya (Paintings)
Hotel Sofitel, Hurghada. Tel 065/ 447261. Daily until 31 July.

Khada El-Zaheiry (Works in ink)
Donia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8367. Daily noon-10pm. Until 14 August.

Mounir Banoub
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm. Until the end of the month.
Works under the title Between Egypt and Canada.

Milton Glaser
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 15 Sept.
Posters and book covers, store designs and toy creations, magazine formats and logotypes are on display at the artist's first exhibition in the Middle East.

Collective Exhibition
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 20 Sept.
A retrospective display of works by Assem Sharaf, Dina El-Gharib, Hassan Ali Ahmed, Hazem El-Mestekawy, Hisham El-Zeiny, Hussein Sharif, Mohamed Abdel-Moneim, Omar El-Fayoumi and Sherif Abdel-Badie, all of whom held exhibitions at the gallery during the last season.

Summer Collection
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Fri, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-10pm. Until the end of Sept.
Works by Taheya Halim, Abdel-Wahab Morsi, Salem Salah, George Bahgoury, Hassan Abdel-Fattah, among others.

Group Exhibition
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 5pm-10pm. Until the end of Sept.
Works by over 20 artists, including George Bahgouri, Mohamed Abla, Salah Hassouna, Xavier Puigmarti, Esmat Dawistashi and Aziz El-Hihi.

Suzanne Mubarak Children's Museum
34 Abu Bakr El-Seddiq St, Heliopolis. Tel 249 9915. Daily exc Mon, 9am-2pm.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the Ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

The Heart Within
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 24 July, 6pm.

Indian Films
Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 27 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5162.
24 July, 4.30pm: Satte Pe Satta
28 July, 4.30pm: Greftaar

Indian Cultural Festival for Children
The latest Indian films for children, clay modelling, floor designs, kite making, yoga, Hindustani music, exhibitions, books, documentaries, dolls, and more at the Integrated Care Society, Heliopolis. Until August. For more information, contact the Information Service of the Indian Embassy, 37 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5243/ 392 5162/3927573.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

The Crucible
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm.
With Daniel Day-Lewis and Wynona Rider.

Mars Attacks
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Jack Nicholson, Glenn Close and Danny De Vito.

Liar Liar
El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
With Jim Carrey.

The English Patient
New Odeon III, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Willem Dafoe and Juliette Binoche in the 9 Oscar awards-winning film.

Sleepers
MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Robert De Niro, Dustin Hoffman, Brad Pitt and Kevin Bacon.



Milton Glaser

Two Much
Cannes II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & Thur-Sat, midnight. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Antonio Banderas, Melanie Griffith and Daryl Hannah.

Before and After
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.
With Meryl Streep and Liam Neeson.

Romeo and Juliet
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Quite an impressive adaptation of William Shakespeare's dramatic language to a very contemporary setting, replete with black leather jackets and neon lights.

Ransom
New Odeon II, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Mel Gibson.

Hazzemni Ya...
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.
Fifi Abdu's play filmed and screened.

Toffaha (A Girl Called Apple)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Leila Elwi and Magued El-Masri.

Esh El-Gharab (Mushroom)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Nour El-Sherif and Youssra.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit and Adila II)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Adel Imam and Sherine.

MUSIC

A Summer Musical Bouquet
Ewart Hall, AUC, Qasr El-Aini St, Tahrir. Tel 357 6373. 24 July, 8pm.
A music recital featuring Valerie de Casseus (soprano) and Samir Mansour (piano) in selections from Chopin, Liszt, Bizet and Fouad.

Arabic Music Ensemble
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 24 July, 9pm.
The ensemble performs selections from the classical repertoire in the manner of a traditional *takht*.

The National Troupe for Popular Music
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 25 July, 9pm.
The troupe performs traditional music on popular instruments.

International Songs and Light Music
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 26 July, 9pm.
Sobhi Bedeir performs.

Jazz Concert
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 27 July, 9pm.
Yehia Khalil and his band perform.

Reda Folkloric Troupe
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 28 July, 9pm.

Evening of Music and Songs
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 30 July, 9pm.
Yasser Moawad performs on percussions.

THEATRE

Toqous El-Esharat Wel-Tahawolat (Rites of Signs and Transformations)
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily, 9pm. Until the end of the month.
Scripted by Saadallah Wanis, directed by Hassan El-Wair, starring Nabil El-Halafawi, Sawsan Badr and Hamdi El-Wazir.

Wada'an Ya Bakawat (Farewell Sirs)
George Abiad Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 10.30pm.
With Hala Sedqi, Farouq El-Feshawi and Ezzat El-Alayli; directed by Essam El-Sayed.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Wed & Thur 10pm, Fri 8pm.
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhy.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Sat & Sun, 10pm, Mon 8pm.
Directed by Mohamed Sobhy and starring all the family members of the televised series.

Bahlool Fi Istanbul
Hilton Ramsis Theatre, Hilton Ramsis annex, El-Galaa St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm.
With Samir Ghanem, Elham Shahin and Bothayna Rashwan.

Leilat Guevara (Guevara's Night)
George Abiad Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 8pm.
With Khalil Morsi, Manal Zaki and Khaled El-Essawi; directed by Assem Nagati.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
With Adel Imam; directed by Sherif Arafa.

El-Mahzala (The Disgrace)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.
With Sherine, Omar El-Hariri and Tarek El-Dessouqi; directed by Shaker Abdel-Latif.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinat Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
A large crowd including Mahmoud El-Guindi, Salah El-Saadani, Sameh Anwar and Ashraf Abdel-Baqi; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

LECTURES

Poetry Evening
Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 23 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5162. 24 July, 7.30pm.
In celebration of the birth of the Prophet Mohamed, a number of poets will read their poems related to the occasion; among them are Sayed Gabr, Mohamed El-Tohami, Mahmoud Khalifa Ghanem, Shawqi Heikel and Mohamed Younes.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064.
Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Mahmoud Mukhtar

HIDDEN, paradoxically, in the very centre of Cairo, is that delightful place, the **Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum**. It was founded in 1964 to house over 200 sculptures by *the* pioneer of modern Egyptian sculpture, creator of — among other quintessentially, though not crassly, nationalist Egyptian sculptures — the Saad Zaghloul statue overlooking Tahrir Bridge and Egypt's Awakening in front of University Bridge. The museum itself, moreover, is a work of art. It was designed by Ramsis Wissa in such a way as to allow natural light to illumine the sculptures on display. Located in the Khaldeen Gardens on Tahrir Street, just across the way from the Opera House, it seems unbelievable that it has received only 575 visitors so far this calendar year. The museum is definitely worth a visit. A shame that it receives so few visitors.

The Art Appreciation Palace, Alexandria plays host to **photographs by Sobhi El-Sharouni**. These are of the Shali El-Tina Citadel in Siwa and the Tombstones of El-Haw in Nagaa Hamadi.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

Learning where to go

But how? By discovering where we are, by reviewing where we have been — the purpose, writes David Blanks, of this month's conference held in Oxford by the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

If you are under the impression that experts are busy debating the merits of Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilisations" theory, think again. In early July scholars attended an international conference *at Oxford* University organised by the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies entitled "Re-thinking Islam." As one would expect, many of the lectures focused upon secularisation, modernisation, political reform, and cultural identity, but not a single voice was raised in defence of Huntington's thesis. There were debates about democracy and economic development; disputes over extremism and civil society; discussions on Islamic law, history, and the arts; and dialogues on gender, human rights, media perceptions, and cultural *imperialism*. Unanimity was rare except on two issues. No one supported the reductionist argument that Muslim and Western cultures are diametrically opposed and on a collision course; and everyone agreed that forming a community of scholarship is vital to providing peace, security, economic growth, and cultural integrity to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

For the participants "Re-thinking Islam" meant re-evaluating conditions in the Muslim world as well as reconsidering what has been written about Islamic thought, politics, and *society in the last* ten to *15* years. Thus the conference was a respite, an interval for the purpose of learning where to go by discovering where we are by reviewing where we have been. As the Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soueif noted: "Some say Western-trained Muslim intellectuals need a sabbatical."

Nasr Abu Zeid gave a lecture asking if secularism and Islam are compatible. Yes and no. It depends upon how one looks at Islam. Seen in terms of its socio-historical dynamism, there is no reason why the two should be incompatible, he explained, especially if one makes a distinction between: "secularism," which amounts to the rationalisation of the social order, and "secularisation," which is the removal of religion from the social order. The distinction is critical. Abu Zeid, who called for a "recontextualisation" of the Muslim message, argued that Islam is by its very nature a move away from idolatry towards the rational conduct of individuals. To illustrate his point he invoked the nineteenth-century reformer Sheikh Muhammad Abdu, who called for a rationalisation of the text, in contrast to founder of the Society of Muslim Brothers, Sheikh Hassan El-Banna, who called for a textualisation of the community.

Abu Zeid's co-panelist, the Moroccan editor, translator, and political commentator, Abed Al-Filali Ansari, saw the tensions between secularism and Islam in similar terms. The problem is that in the West religious reform preceded an internal process of secularisation whereas in the Muslim world secularisation, which is imposed from without, has preceded reform — hence the volatility of modernisation. Given these circumstances, fundamentalism becomes a natural component of secularism and a consequence of the failure of nationalism. When asked if one could be a secularist and a Muslim at *the same time*, Ansari replied that "we can be secularists and better Muslims." He sees Islam as a rationalising principle aimed at improving society for the sake of every individual. Communities can retain spiritual values, and avoid the heavy costs of secularisation borne by the West, by not making idols of technology and science. It is a reformist notion. "We are walking forward but looking backward," Abu Zeid added. "Eventually we will have to turn around."

But how can Muslim communities protect the family, cultural identity, and religious traditions when faced with the dilemma of Mecca versus mechanisation? To compete economically and politically means investing in education, especially technical education, yet as Dartmouth anthropologist Dale Eickelman pointed out, mass dissent is frequently a function of mass education and mass communication. Political scientists used to talk of the revolution of rising expectations, but Eickelman and others *are trying to figure out how* the benefits of education lead to undesired side-effects. When students learn to read, write, and think for themselves, they begin to ask questions, sometimes about the social order, more often about religion. Not that they question its validity; rather they want to understand the reasons behind Islamic traditions. They want to know a little theology to help them understand the rituals. Of course the *ulama* are there to provide the answers, but they too are forced to change with the times. Crises arise when material culture changes faster than ideas. When, for example, technical capabilities sever social policy from traditional interpretations, the fabric of society is torn. Then judges, politicians and scholars have to work together to mend the damage caused by new thinking over issues such as organ transplants and female circumcision.

In a similar vein, the unravelling of custom was the theme of a lecture by Hind Wassef, a part-time instructor at the American University in Cairo and a researcher for the Population Council, an international NGO devoted to population studies, reproductive health and women's issues. In her analysis of the Egyptian writer Abdel-Hakim Qasim, she showed how Qasim's novel, "The Seven Days of Man," chronicled the impact of education on a Delta boy who becomes estranged from his village when he moves to Tanta. Sitting at the feet of the *ulama*, he learns the official view of Islam, and is forced to rethink the *moulid* of El-Sayed El-Badawi as it is celebrated by the people from his village; consequently, he becomes embarrassed by the *baladi* behaviour of his friends and relatives.

Yet it is not a matter of right versus wrong or good versus evil: all of the characters in the story are moral individuals with good intentions. The challenge is figuring out how to negotiate change. According to Wassef, these are problems internal to Muslim societies, which require local solutions and need not be referenced to the West; and as one of the members of the audience pointed out, religious programmes such as Sheikh Sha'rawi's are popular precisely because they stitch together simple faith and official Islam, filling the emotional void created by the decline of traditional entertainments such as the *moulid*. Another Egyptian participant, Nadia Abu Zahra, addressed the changing nature of the *moulid* of El-Sayida Zeinab in a lecture based upon her new book, *The Pure and the Powerful* (Ithaca Press, 1997). Abu Zahra concludes that the cultural distance between the *fellahin* and the educated elites is not as great as we might think.

What, then, of the "clash of civilisations" that we have all been hearing about? Surely a conference on "Re-thinking Islam" must have had some fireworks. True. The clashes, however, were not necessarily between the West and the rest. Put two Iranian intellectuals in the same room, raise the issue of the revolution, and the fuse is lit — and this without the explosive admixture of Abdulkarim Sorosh, who was scheduled to speak, but whose passport was revoked before he could leave Tehran. Or try yelling *fiqh* in a crowded theatre. Or mention the peace process, which is a virtual battle cry amongst scholars. To be sure, there were moments of high drama.

Sheikh Muhammad Abdu (front left) who called for a rationalisation of the text, in contrast to founder of the Society of Muslim Brothers, Sheikh Hassan Al-Banna, who called for a textualisation of the community

And there were some provocative remarks. A professor from Tel Aviv naively called for the return of Orientalism, by which he meant the time-honoured study of Middle Eastern history and languages. And a maladroit enthusiast of political correctness recklessly threw the charge of Orientalism at Fred Halliday, Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and author of *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation* (IB Tauris, 1996). Clearly Halliday had heard it all before. "Ironically, narrow-minded cultural nationalism is a function of globalism," he replied. "One has a right and a responsibility to study other *cultures and peoples*."

Scholars who are zealously politically correct lack the sense of irony needed to re-think any serious topic, and if ever there was a subject needing an infusion of humour, it is the generally sullen debate about Islam and the West. Even Nasr Abu Zeid tried levity in his remarks about political reform. "We need our own size democracy," he quipped, "because we are too fat to fit into the Western model."

But the best jest came from the Dartmouth professor who summed up the complexities of modernisation and North/South relations with grim irony. Have you heard the one about the aborted attack on Paris? It seems that at the height of the Gulf War, a certain Middle Eastern government decided to take the fight to Europe by launching the mother of all missiles. The president pushed the red button, but nothing happened. Again and again he attempted to fire the rocket, but it refused to lift off. The generals were embarrassed; the technicians baffled. Finally, in desperation, an emergency repair team was sent to the launch site. They discovered that the missile had malfunctioned because it was too heavy. A group of jobless peasants was clinging to the warhead. They wanted to emigrate.

Plain Talk

I have just come across an article in the *Guardian* by Michael Billington on the crisis of regional theatre in Britain. In fact the article reads like the continuation of a conversation I had with the *Guardian*'s drama critic during my visit to London as a guest of the British Council. Billington then expressed his worries about the future of regional repertory theatre in Britain, which has for years served as a forcing ground for new theatrical talent.

Billington begins his article with a question: Is regional theatre dead? Is the British public satisfied by the seemingly endless number of television soaps?

Britain's 44 regional theatres have run up a deficit of 8.5 million pounds sterling. At the same time, the Arts Council, which provides subsidies to regional theatres, has itself faced cuts in funding. From its reduced grant, the Arts Council must not only find sufficient subsidies to fund 44 repertory theatres, but also funds 67 regional companies, while a further 200 companies receive aid from regional arts boards.

Most large towns in Britain *have at least one theatre*, many dating from the 19th century. Universities also have theatre companies which play to the general public and a network of art centres exists which usually incorporate a well-equipped studio theatre. A great many regional productions transfer to the West End, often to great acclaim.

In America, regional theatre is less developed. It is a fairly new phenomenon and one that Joseph Zeigler describes in his book, *The Regional Theater: The Revolutionary Stage*, as constituting nothing less than a revolution. By providing an alternative to Broadway, regional theatre gave impetus to a new generation of writers and artists who were nurtured away from the bright lights of the metropolitan theatre. The rise of regional theatre in America was, Zeigler writes, "dependent upon a concept of *theater as an institution* rather than the entrepreneurial phenomenon that it is on Broadway."

Regional theatre also serves a community role and programming is often integrated with the activities of schools and other community associations.

Regional theatre constitutes an historic investment. It provides the only forum where the entire community can be addressed. It has educated audiences and nurtured talent in a manner that the accountants who seem increasing to influence Arts Council policy appear unable to understand. And today, perhaps more than ever, Billington argues, there is a strong social case for keeping regional theatres alive. "Wander around our increasingly desolate city centres at night," he writes, "and they are often the only real source of communal life."

Americans tend to view regional theatre as an embryonic national theatre, serving much the same role, say, as the Berliner Ensemble in Germany, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre in England, and the Moscow Art Theatre in Russia. In Britain, though, regional theatre is viewed as part and parcel of an on-going and long-established theatrical tradition whose strength lies in the ability to promote new drama.

How, you may well ask, does all this relate to Egypt? Do we have a regional theatre in Egypt, and, if so, what role does it play? True, we do have what used to be called The Department of Popular Culture, which was recently renamed The Department of Cultural Palaces. When first formed, during the time that Tharwat Okasha was the minister of culture in the early sixties, the avowed aim of the department was to facilitate a two-way traffic — to energise cultural life in the provinces which had been sadly neglected, and also to act as a channel by which new talents could be uncovered with the aim of creating local theatrical infrastructures.

Has it worked? Certainly most cultural palaces now boast their own theatre troupes in addition to folkloric ensembles, which can only be seen as an encouraging sign. This does not mean, however, that there is not a great deal of room for new and concerted initiatives.

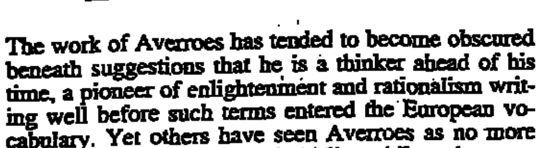
Mursi Saad El-Din

Books



A time for rationalism

Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics, No 16 ; Averroes and the Rational Legacy in the East and West: Cairo, AUC Press



The work of Averroes has tended to become obscured beneath suggestions that he is a thinker ahead of his time, a pioneer of enlightenment and rationalism writing well before such terms entered the European vocabulary. Yet others have seen Averroes as no more than a commentator on Aristotelian philosophy, one, furthermore, who makes no original contribution.

The task the current edition of *Alif* sets itself is to identify the real value of Averroes, recognising both the worth of his work and its limitations. The tone is set in Ibrahim Youssef El-Naggar's contribution to this collection of essays, a discussion of how Averroes has been misrepresented in both East and West, past and present, not only by his enemies but also by his disciples. El-Naggar illustrates how Arab secularists have sought to depict Averroes as a super-rationalist and how this representation was used as a tool to combat the dominant traditionalist *religious tendency*. Thus Averroes came to be a tool in philosophical, religious and political battles, during the course of which his work was consistently distorted in order that he might fit more easily in the parade of enlightenment.

In the West a number of Latin Averroeists ascribed to him the doctrine of incompatible double truth— religious truth and philosophical truth. El-Naggar argues that Averroes actually believed in a single truth that can be reached via two different routes, one religious, the other philosophical. Averroes, he continues, believed in a harmony between religion and philosophy, between divine regulation and reason.

El-Naggar rejects any romanticising of Averroes' rationalism, insisting that Averroes was never an ascetic rationalist. He was a physician and chief *qadi*, and his philosophical study turned around two major meanings — studying things pursuing to proofs, and studying these things with the aim of discerning who created them. Naggar's *view of* Averroes' modernism sets firm boundaries and to prove his theory Naggar quotes from Averroes own *Manahij al-Adilla* (Ways of Arguments), with its insistence that *shari'a* has two facets, one external, the other internal, the external being understood as it is, without interpretation by common people, the internal interpreted allegorically but only by those with the requisite knowledge.

El-Naggar denies that Averroes divided people into rigid categories, according to pre-determined rational capacities, as Plato had done. Rather, El-Naggar argues, Averroes saw all people as initially equal. Differences accrue through individual intellectual effort. Since everyone intuitively knows that God exists, Averroes argues that everyone then has the potential to understand the proofs of His existence.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zeid, in "The discourse of Ibn Rushd: Between Knowledge and Constraint", argues from different point of view concerning the limits of Averroes rationalism. For him, Ibn Rushd represents a marginal culture, while Imam *Al-Ghazali occupies the* centre. Abu Zeid discusses the cultural struggle which consigned Averroes to the margin and established the hegemony of Sufi mysticism. Once expelled, Ibn Rushd found a more opportune context that made of him of him Averroes: a process of Westernisation. Abu Zeid considers Averroes as a representative off Aristotelian rationalism in Islamic garb. He also traces the exchange that took place between Ibn Rushd and Al-Ghazali, arguing that Al-Ghazali had to borrow philosophical elements from Averroes in his quest to demolish the philosophy from *which* he was borrowing, while Ibn Rushd did not use demonstration to establish the existence of a dogma but rather used it to interpret that dogma.

Abu Zeid shows how Ibn Rushd distinguished between two types of knowledge — that for the intellectual elite and that suitable for commoners. He concluded that Sufism suited the masses more than demonstration, which Abu Zeid perceives as a concession made to the discourse of Al-Ghazali who had argued that common people should not read The Book of Demonstration and consequently prohibited the publication of any interpretation of *shari'a*, arguing that only the elite should read such material. Abu Zeid concludes by seeing, in these concessions, something more than El-Naggar's pragmatic realism, insisting that the concessions were instrumental in establishing the centrality of Al-Ghazali's thought and proscribing the extent of any future rationalism.



A recently erected statue of Averroes in Cordoba

Abdel-Mejid Sghiar focuses on the ways in which the philosophy of Ibn Rushd ebbed from the Mahgreb, arguing that Averroes' ordeal, exemplified by his exile and the burning of his books, is in itself insufficient to understand the limited influence of his thought in the Maghreb. Rather, he explains such limited influence as a function of the conditions prevalent during the Muwahhid dynasty, at whose court Averroes was employed before being expelled.

The Muwahhids implemented a reformist programme aimed at unity and uniformity, to be achieved by a return to roots in the hope that this would minimise the possibilities for political and religious schisms. They ordered the burning of any book diverting the people from the basis of their faith.

It was a dynasty vehemently opposed to pluralism, and Averroes was in agreement with a *state ideology* that rejected a variety of interpretations. It is thus that the author explains Averroes concentration on Aristotle's *The First Master* and its importance in deciding any differences of opinion. The quest for uniformity also lies at the heart of Averroes' attack on dialectical theologians as misinterpretors of the *sharia*, which he considered as sister to wisdom and philosophy. But the quest for uniformity made it easy for Al-Ghazali to infiltrate the Averroeist school, and Youssef Ibn Tumlus, one of Averroes' most distinguished disciples, was able to argue that Aristotelian logic, mediated via Al-Ghazali, was the only component of Aristotle' philosophy worth defending.

In discussing Averroes as a jurist Hassan Hanafi draws attention to his pioneering of *ijtihad* — reflective interpretation — in the face of the long tradition of *taqlid* — unreflective adoption.

Averroes' jurisprudence insisted on the supremacy of understanding the spirit of law, a spirit that can only be reached by distinguishing between the core of those laws and their circumstantial manifestations.

Charles Butterworth attempts to show in his article how Averroes did not believe in the possibility of general enlightenment, nor in the possibility of the spread of science and knowledge with the aim of using them for the liberation of mankind. Butterworth argues that Averroes differed from enlightenment philosophers in his concentration on the relationship between *shari'a* (divine law) and wisdom, and that this focus, his main preoccupation in his two major works *Decisive Treatises* and *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, pays scant attention to how one dominates the other.

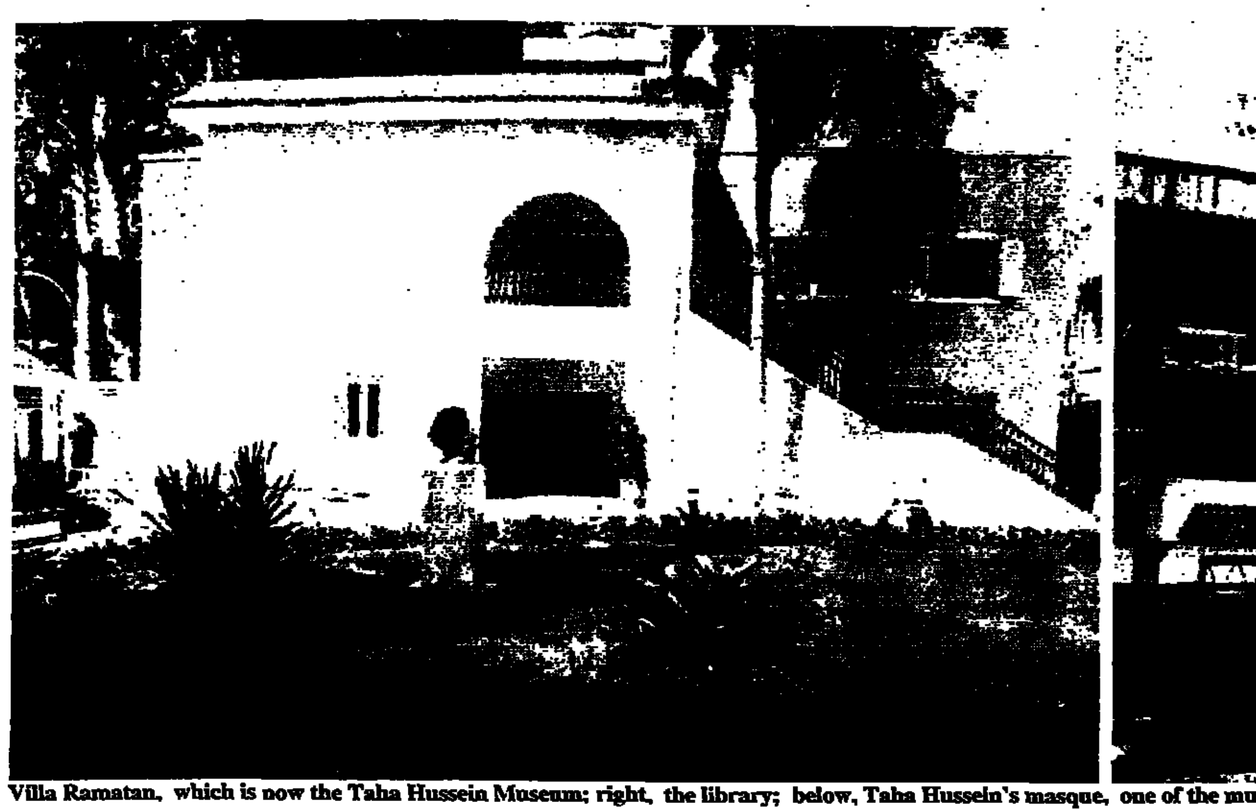
Harold Stone attempts, in his article, to provide an answer to the question why Europeans stopped reading Averroes. In his opinion Averroes importance for the Christian West during the Middle Ages was as a commentator on Aristotle. During the 16th century Averroes' ideas on logic were taught at a large number of Italian universities but from the 17th century onwards he was increasingly perceived as an atheist, ascribed with the belief that without rational proof one cannot assert the immortality of the individual soul, a notion abhorrent to the faithful. Aristotle, too, came under attack in the 17th century, which automatically damaged the reputation of Averroes.

By the 18th century Averroes' ideas were so distorted in philosophical dictionaries as to be barely recognisable and by the 19th century he had become sufficiently marginalised as to merit little more than a footnote in Hegel's *History of Philosophy*.

So much for Averroes in the West. Anke von Kugelgen deals with 20th century Arab Averroeists, arguing that a number of Arab thinkers, particularly Farah Antun, Mahmoud Qasim, Hassan Hanafi, Mohamed Emara, Tayyib Tizini and Abid Al-Jabiri all considered the neglect of Averroes' rationalism as underwriting the poverty of Arab philosophy. Any regeneration of Arab culture from within, they believe, must begin with a revival of rationalism as exemplified by Averroes.

Von Kugelgen not only traces Averroes' influence in the writings of a number of Arab thinkers but also deals with contemporary misrepresentations, arguing that Mahmoud Qasim, for example, twists many of Averroes notions, presenting a far from true picture diametrically opposed to that prevalent in 17th century Europe. She also discusses Mohamed Emara's suggestion that following Averroes' method can allow for a reconciliation between rationalism and faith, and between philosophy and religion, thus settling many of the intellectual battles currently raging in the Arab and Islamic world. What Kugelgen does not seem to realise is that Emara himself no longer sees the possibility of any reconciliation between materialism and idealism. Abid El-Jabiri, von Kugelgen concludes, is the one Arab who understands Averroes, and who comprehends the distinction Averroes made between religion and philosophy, each having separate bases and rules but applying to different domains that should not be confused.

Reviewed by ***Ibrahim Fathi***



Villa Ramatan, which is now the Taha Hussein Museum; right, the library; below, Taha Hussein's masque, one of the museum's exhibits

photos: Aref Saadeddin

Wish you were here

The secrets of Taha Hussein's life are revealed. **Rania Khallaf** takes a peek

Last week, Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni inaugurated the museum dedicated to the "doyen of Arabic literature," internationally-renowned writer Taha Hussein, which has opened in the Pyramids area.

The restoration of Taha Hussein's *Ramatan*, or "The Two Oases", is part of a project to "preserve the memory of the country and its living history," says Ahmed Nawwar, head of both the National Centre for Plastic Arts and the museums department at the Supreme Council for Antiquities. Visiting the homes of national icons such as Taha Hussein allows the public to grow more familiar with figures who otherwise could remain forbidding or, at best, remote.

In 1992, the Ministry of Culture purchased Villa Ramatan. Hussein had lived there from 1955 until he passed away in 1973. His wife continued to live there until she, too, passed away in 1989. On the first floor is the reception room where Hussein held his legendary weekly cultural gatherings. Walking into the room, one is immediately struck by the magnificent portrait of his wife, a gramophone *and the radio by which Hussein* used to sit to listen to the Qur'an. The room also holds the piano Hussein's French wife, Susanne, was fond of playing.

Hussein himself was renowned for his passion for music. His record collection is vast, and mainly composed of classical works. The writer's bedroom, on the second floor, is sober: the prevailing tones are mauve, dark blue and brown. The furniture reflects his taste for a simplicity verging on the austere. A simple bed, a wardrobe where his clothes still hang, some pictures and a few small figurines are all that adorn the room. On the wall of Susanne's bedroom hangs a portrait of the Virgin Mary — a pre-nuptial gift from Hussein. Another room in the museum will be reserved for the display of the many awards, medals and certificates of merit Hussein received throughout his life. On the whole, restoration work has been limited to an attempt to preserve Hussein's simple life-style and the spirit of the era in which he lived.

The huge library that Hussein left reflects his varied cultural interests: religious, literary and philosophical works, many in French, jostle for space on the shelves. The General Egyptian Book Organisation had appropriated about three thousand books from this library, but the Ministry of Culture was able to obtain these, thus restoring Hussein's collection. "We intend to reprint some of his rarer books. In future, we plan to transfer his collection onto CD-ROM," says Mustafa El-Sharqawi, director of the museum.

Hussein was also known for his sponsorship of the fine arts. On the walls of the museum hang portraits by prominent Egyptian and Arab painters, including Ragheb Ayad and Ahmed Sabri.

"The museum will be listed on tours, and will be linked with other national and foreign cultural centres," adds El-Sharqawi.

"In order to make the museum attractive to children, special facilities will be presented to schools, including *special writing workshops to* encourage the new generation to learn about a pioneer thinker," he says. The museum will also provide visitors to the museum, especially blind students, with recordings of original interviews with Taha Hussein, who was blind himself. In the music room, where Taha Hussein listened to his favourite works, classical music will be played every day.

To increase the intensely personal atmosphere of the museum, photographs of Hussein at different times of his life will also be displayed.

To encourage young researchers to study his ideas, the museum is to compile an exhaustive database including every article written on Taha Hussein in the national and international press, says Mohamed Nawwar. A web site will enable cultural centres elsewhere to benefit from this information, and thus gain a deeper understanding of Egypt's cultural heritage. "We are currently studying the possibility of issuing a monthly magazine, called *Ramatan*," notes Nawwar. A festival to celebrate Hussein's birthday, 14 November, is also being envisaged.



Clay bust by Farouk Ibrahim

Banking on a monument

THE PALACE at 27 Sherif Street was built by a French baron, a *professional* architect with a passion for Orientalia, during the reign of Khedive Abbas Helmi II, in 1894. On 11 June 1914, the palace was sold to a merchant, Maurice Nahman. Nahman's heirs, in turn, sold the palace to a commercial establishment misleadingly called the Egyptian Import-Export Bank. In the early '60s, a decree was issued merging this company with the Alexandria Bank, but the decree (based on the false premise that Import-Export was a bank, not a company) was never implemented.

The Alexandria Bank, however, simply occupied the premises, writes **Zeinab Abul-Gheit**. In the absence of legal ownership, seizure was always an option. According to real estate development laws, contracts of ownership in cases like this must take the form of a ministerial or a presidential decree, which is not the case here. Ownership must be also recorded at the Property Ownership Bureau: the Bank has failed to take this step so far.

The Alexandria Bank, in fact, is now seeking to demolish the palace in order to construct a modern office building in its stead. The bank has already destroyed many of the Islamicate features of the palace's façade, and illegally added a third floor. *Mashrabiya* panels decorating the façade have also been removed. *One of the bank's officials, who re*fused to be named, claims that the Alexandria Bank is the legal owner of the building. According to the same source, a verdict was pronounced ordering the demolition of the palace in 1982, but the sentence was finally reversed on 12 April 1995. The employees left their palatial offices 10 years ago, however, because they feared the premises would collapse.

Ibrahim Amer, expert in Islamic, Coptic and Jewish Antiquities at the General Antiquities Authority, accuses Alexandria Bank officials of sabotaging the building intentionally in order to convince government officials that it was on the verge of collapse. This would allow the bank to obtain a permit for the demolition of the palace, and would provide an ideal site downtown on which to erect a large, reinforced concrete edifice.

Nabila El-Qadi, the owner of a company with offices in the palace basement, agrees with Amer. She says that experts from the Ministry of Engineering, the Ministry of Justice and the municipality examined the building and pronounced it in good condition. The palace was registered as a monument on 13 March 1995.



The facade of the palace at 27 Sherif Street

photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Pot Pourri

The hundred-pound note

There have been times in my life where things did not really look good. One day in particular, when I woke up, I knew at once that I was downward bound. I had just discovered, the night before, that all I had left was a single hundred-pound note. There were ten days to go until the end of the month. Now, lying in bed, pretending to myself that I was still asleep, I tried different ways of dividing one hundred by ten. The result kept giving me that sinking feeling, which put a serious damper on my naturally optimistic disposition.

Maybe by being extra careful, barring any sort of accident, things might just work out, provided we got paid on the last day of the month. If not... Soon I was making a mental survey of all that could go wrong in the next week or so. "This will simply not do," I finally decided, and forced myself out of bed. I put two tea bags in my cup instead of the usual three. The idea of saving ten tea bags did not make the tea taste any better. I have always hated tea bags anyway. I should think of cutting down on cigarettes, I reflected, lighting the first one of the day. I began to get ready for work.

While dressing, I rapidly went through the pockets of everything I had worn recently. One never knows. Neither the pockets nor my other bag yielded more than a couple of coins. No uplifting surprise was in store and, to console myself, I conjured up memories of a day in Sydney, when I had been down to even less than what I owned at present. I had managed then, so why not now?... I cheered up at the realisation that I had completely forgotten the details of the happy dénouement which had undoubtedly crowned that difficult moment.

I put the last touches to my makeup, carefully placed the hundred-pound note in my bag and left the house, making sure that all appliances were duly turned off. I could afford neither a fire nor a flood under the circumstances.

In those days I drove a car which invariably provoked my friends' mirth. New car jokes were always told whenever I appeared. I had to jump-start the vehicle in question every morning. One of the windows could not be rolled up, the other could not be rolled down, and one of the doors did not open. If it had seen better days, these were by then only faint memories, and certainly none of them were mine. Anyway, at this point, I was not worried by its aspect, but by the flat tyre that I had just observed as I walked out the front gate.

For some unfathomable reason, I have never learned to change a tyre. I have managed to master changing the two current varieties of light bulbs, faucet stoppers and even butane bottles, but when it comes to cars, I am hopeless. Consequently, I stood there stupidly, thinking that if I went into the house and started all over again, maybe the tyre would look healthier. Mercifully, a taxi driver stopped and offered to change the tyre for me. "Do you have a spare?" he asked. Of course I did not have a spare, and he showed brilliant initiative in the face of such an obstacle: he would take the tyre, he suggested, have it repaired and bring it back.

The idea that he could disappear with the tyre did cross my mind, but one look at the thing reassured me. It was so worn that no one in his right mind would have wanted to own it, let alone go to the trouble of stealing it.

I waited patiently, and eventually the driver returned with my tyre. The tear was so bad, he had paid five pounds to repair it, he said. "They didn't want to do it, you know, they thought the wheel itself needed changing. Why don't you do something about your car?" he added. I considered his question rhetorical and ignored it. I had other worries. Five pounds plus another five for the man's trouble set me back ten pounds, and the day had not stared yet.

Slowly, I took the hundred-pound note from my bag. I fingered it gently noticing that it was new and very crisp. I rather liked the way it felt in my hand. I suddenly realised that the taxi driver was looking at me inquisitively. "I have to make change to pay you," I said. "Forget it," he answered, resorting to the consecrated formula of politeness. The thought of his face *if I did take him up on his offer crossed my mind.* I giggled. What if I told him: "Really? Well, all right, thank you very much then..."? What could possibly happen? At this point, I suspected that he was probably richer than me.

"If you can't make change, I'll do it for you," I heard a voice say, and at the same time I heard the taxi driver gun his motor. He had swiftly pulled the bill from my hand and was taking off. He looked back and waved to me, his hand clutching my hundred pounds. "Don't move, I'll be right back with the change," he called, and sped off, roaring with laughter.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Chard leaves with minced meat

Ingredients:

1 1/2 kg chard
1/2 kg minced meat
1 large onion (finely chopped)
2 cups tomato juice
Butter
Salt+pepper+allspice

Method:

Wash the chard and coarsely chop it through the stems. Put chard in a strainer and pour one litre of boiling water over it. Allow to drain. In a cooking pan, heat the butter and gently fry the onion until just tender. Add the minced meat, season and stir over medium heat. Add the chard and stir over medium heat for ten (10) minutes. Add the tomato juice and some water if needed. Cover and simmer until cooked and dried. Serve hot with rice and a yoghurt and cucumber salad, seasoned with salt, crushed garlic and dried mint.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Subterranean homesick blues

Andrew Steele discovers size isn't everything

Contrary to popular myth, Cairo does have a proper pub. Deals nestles below street level on the corner of El-Maahad El-Swissri Street in Zamalek, and despite its diminutive size, they seem to have got it just right. One is first faced with a *prie dieu* disguised as an entry desk, and bearing the legend "reservations only". A mere ploy, I feel, to keep out a certain element, but quite whom they may be, I wouldn't like to say, as Deals is often alarmingly crowded.

As one passes through the wee, three-quarter-height door (it used to have a knob, you know; this has now been replaced with a more user-friendly handle), one finds oneself surrounded by stained oak and brass fittings that, quite frankly, bespeak pub. All is as spick and as span can be, from the polished crazy paving flooring to the faux columns with their faux cracks. The chalkboards vaunt today's specials in gleaming black and white, and the mirrors and art prints don't reflect the understated light in such a way as to make it unflattering. There is an electric variety of pounding music to accompany the silent, flickering television sets which are mounted in the corners. A fresco adorns the ceiling, rife with cherubim, a motif repeated elsewhere in plaster of Paris and framed print.

So where to sit? It is often the bar — more out of necessity than choice — as the tables, both high and low, don't stay free much beyond 8 o'clock. Those that remain unoccupied are adorned with a declamatory "reserved" placard, scotching any chance one might have of obtaining one.

In terms of menu, one has a choice, the regular printed or the daily chalkboard, offering a fairly wide selection of bar fare. I elected a baba ghanoug and a grilled chicken skewer, while my companion decided on a seafood salad. Place-mats depicting Barbara Steele's (no relation) bucket of blood celluloid epic *Danse Macabre* were duly proffered and the vittels arrived after a pleasingly short time lapse. To describe the fare in gourmet terms would be an affectation, for this is assembly-line food. Given that, it is assembly-line food done with a more than a bit of a flourish; in fact, it is done surprisingly well. The baba ghanoug was raked into furrows and drizzled with olive oil. It had an authentically smoky flavour and was smooth and creamy. Full marks there. The chicken had been well marinated in garlic, amongst other things, and came skewered with the statutory capsicum and tomato slices. Served with rice and a raita dressing, chicken-in-the-basket it certainly wasn't. The salad contained the classic trilogy of ingredients — calamari, shrimps and chunks of seabass in a very very lemony vinaigrette with fine slices of raw capsicum and onion. Haute cuisine it is not, but haute cuisine is not what one expects.

Deals, then, is a good night out. Throw in some food if you wish, or just spend the evening swilling ale. The staff are friendly and efficient, the crowd are very much "in". And with a price of LE60 for supper for two and two Stellas, I'm afraid one must call Mr Dylan to order for the suggestion that "look out kids, you're gonna get hit".

Deals, 2 El-Maahad El-Swissri Street, Zamalek Tel: 341 0502

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS

1. Trefoil card; bludgeon (4)
5. Bolt (5)
10. Fill to the brim (4)
15. Aviaries (5)
16. Nimbus (4)
17. Reckoning by eights (5)
19. Miss Farow (4)
20. R. Valentino's dance (5)
21 3.1416 (2)
22. Foilers; alienators (9)
25 Indefinite article (2)
26. Common Italian name (4)
27. Habit; mechanical procedure (4)
29. Violent storm with whirling winds (7)
32. Acute; ardent (7)
35. Breathless; expectant (4)
36. Inasmuch (5)
40. Fate (4)
41. Demented (4)
42. Except (4)
44. Indian title (5)
46. Concern; advantage (4)
47. Corrected (7)
49. Taster (7)
51. Lithe (4)
52. Not a (4)
53. Organisation advocating classless society, abb. (2)
55. Soulless; vapid (9)
59. Similar (2)
61. Sever, bisect (5)
63. Pastoral poem (3)
64. Blemish; befoulment (5)
65. S-shaped line (4)
67. Rounded convex mouldings (5)
69. Finished (4)
70. Slave (4)
71. Draws reign; stands still (5)
72. Crack; disjoint (4)

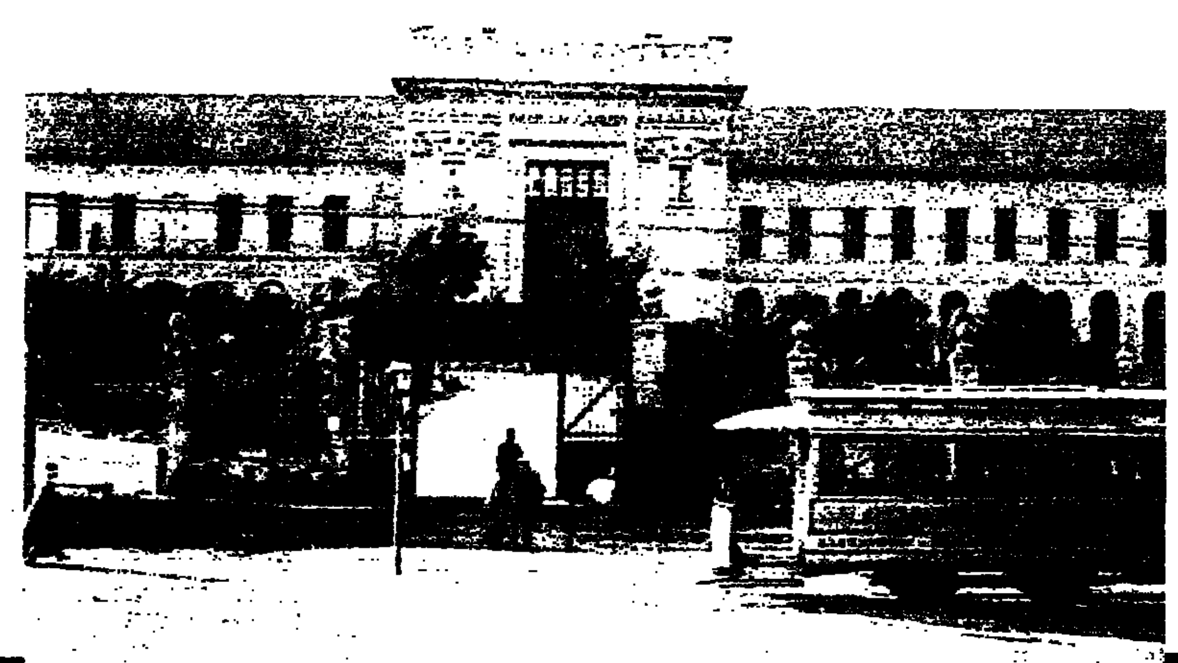
DOWN

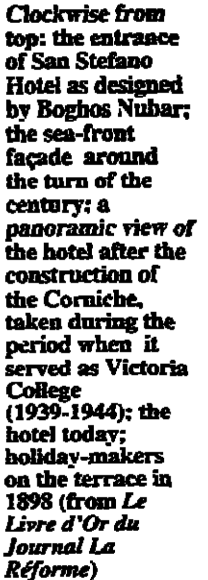
1. Batch; garner (4)
2. Positions in treatise; localities (4)
3. Of last month, abb. (3)
4. Demeanour; giving birth (7)
5. Symbol for "actinium" (2)
6. Site of Vatican city (4)
7. Make turbid by agitating (4)
8. A precious stone (4)
9. Weather directions (2)
10. Reprimand; purge (7)
11. Raced (3)
12. Seaweed (4)
13. Look or move listlessly; satellite of any planet (4)
18. Easternmost river in Siberia (4)
20. Run at moderate pace (4)
23. Small herds of whales (4)
26. Ruts (7)
28. Deviation (7)
29. A slit thong for punishing children (5)
30. Ancient British and Irish alphabet (5)
31. Greased (5)
32. A seizure; rhythmical stress (5)
33. Assuage thirst (5)
34. Large duck with soft feathers (5)
37. Peg of wood (3)
43. Make cheerful (7)
44. Judge's seat (4)
45. Prestige (4)
46. Branches out; amplifies (7)
48. Eat (4)
50. Without luster (4)
53. Fell; dart about (4)
54. Send after; messenger (4)
56. Star showing sudden brightness, then subsiding (4)
57. Effigy (4)
58. Dissolve, merge into (4)
59. ... and the King of Siam (4)
60. Hoofbeat (4)
62. Tolstoy (3)
65. Electrically charged particle (3)
67. Expression of pleasure (2)
68. Present of "be" (2)

Last week's solution

Through the hourglass

No celebrations marked the hundred and tenth anniversary of the San Stefano Hotel in Alexandria this year, a year that looks set to seal its fate. Hala Halim profiles Alexandria's oldest hotel and looks into its uncertain future

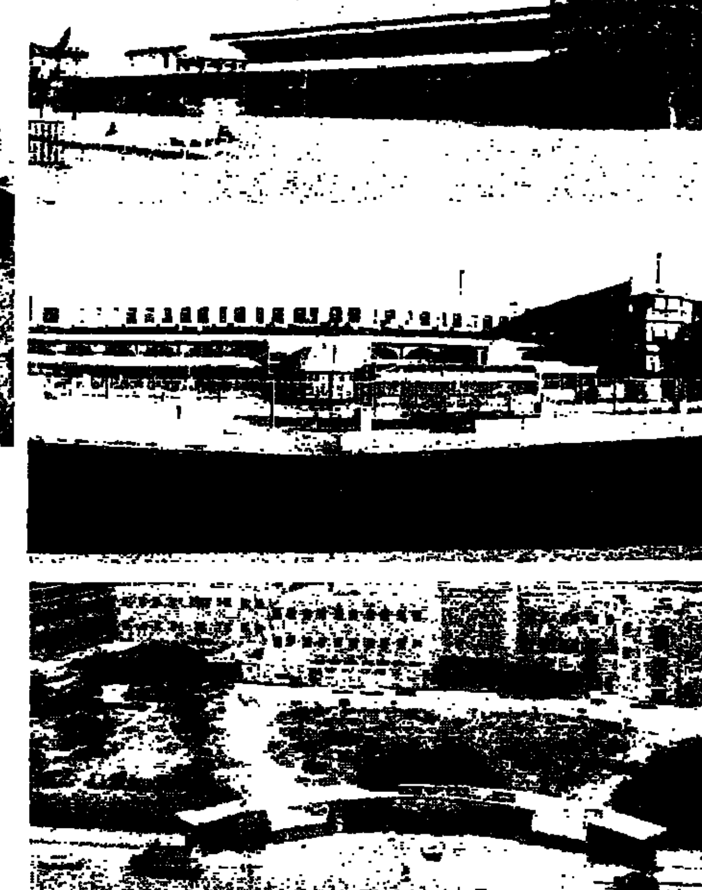




Clockwise from top: the entrance of San Stefano Hotel as designed by Boghos Nubar; the sea-front façade around the turn of the century; a panoramic view of the hotel after the construction of the Corniche, taken during the period when it served as Victoria College (1939-1944); the hotel today; holiday-makers on the terrace in 1898 (from *Le Livre d'Or du Journal La Réforme*)







photos courtesy of Mohamed Awad

photo: Sherif Sonbol

To be or not to be privatised — a question which, in the case of San Stefano, Alexandria's oldest surviving hotel, will be settled towards the end of the year, when the establishment is put up for sale. When this happens, the smouldering debate about the historical value of San Stefano Hotel and the issue of its conservation is bound to flare up again. In a previous round of the controversy, in 1988, conservationists put paid to an offer from the Al-Fayeds, of Harrods and Ritz fame, to buy the San Stefano Hotel, according to a columnist from the daily *Al-Ahram* (6 April 1996).

When Khedive Tewfik inaugurated the hotel on 26 June 1887, he was officiating over the launch of a bold, futuristic enterprise. The hotel was situated in what were the outskirts of Alexandria at the time, the area called Ramleh, meaning "sand" — an expanse to the east of the city occupied by Bedouins and punctuated by the occasional "summer residence" of wealthy Alexandrians. Indeed, one of these summer dwellings, that of the Greek Count Zizinia, was responsible for giving the hotel, and later the tram stop, its name. Count Etienne (or Stephane) de Zizinia dedicated the private chapel he built in 1863 to his patron saint, San Stefano. The construction of the San Stefano Hotel was funded by the Société de Chemins de Fer de Ramleh, the railway company. The aim was "to encourage the inhabitants of Alexandria to visit Ramleh, to settle there, and consequently to use the railway", writes Radames Lackany in *Quelques Notes de Toponomie Alexandrines*.

Khedival patronage notwithstanding, the ever-gossipy Alexandrians did not spare the architect of San Stefano Hotel and Casino, Boghos Nubar. If the potted history given in the *Livre d'Or du Journal La Réforme* is to be trusted, there had been a textile factory on the site, and the hotel was a remodelling and extension of the structure. "Wagging tongues — and the Lord knows they are always wagging — say that the entrepreneur charged with this transformation, on delivery of his masterpiece, had forgotten to install... the staircase leading to the upper storeys", claimed *La Réforme*. A likely story, indeed!

The actual building, with its latticed wooden verandahs, the landscaping of the grounds around the hotel (the garden and tennis courts on the street-side and the music kiosk on the sea-front) and the services offered made it a huge success. The author of *Ramleh Als Winteraufenthalt* (Ramleh, the Winter Resort, 1900) describes it as the ideal setting for a rest cure and a transit stop for "those who come from the warmer parts of Egypt and from India, before they return to Europe." The buildings were lit by electricity produced by the hotel's own generator, guests enjoyed hot baths and the owner, one Luigi Steinschneider, his wife and the manager, a Mr Sabbag, were all paragons of courtesy.

In those pre-Corniche days, the San Stefano Hotel still had direct access to the beach. The San Stefano beach had two bathing establishments, one for women and the other for men, separated by a wooden partition. For those on the prowl, however, the segregation was cause for disgruntlement. One male journalist from *La Réforme* betook himself to the beach armed with a pair of binoculars. To his chagrin, the women, having parked their children or younger siblings in a special area before taking a dip, were "egoists like a harem". San Stefano beach, he sniffed, was "the very model of the virtuous beach".

It was at the concerts that people socialised with a vengeance. Beatrice Boulad, writing about Alexandria's summertime pleasures, describes the San Stefano concerts as an institution:

"The pleasures offered by the Casino made the charm of Alexandria in the summer. From 10am, panama hats and dome-like parasols projected clear-cut shadows into the central aisle strewn with reddish sand. At the entrance, a large poster on an easel indicated that Edgardo Bonomi would be conducting the nth symphony concert of the season. For these weekly occasions, all Alexandria became music-lovers. At about 11am, the musicians gathered on the platform. The upper part of the wall behind them was curved in the shape of a shell, to throw back the sound of the music onto the esplanade. The musical instruments were tuned and, amid the dissonant sounds were hints of a theme which would be played later."

E M Forster, stationed in Alexandria during the First World War, found that the audience's enthusiasm tended to spoil the fun. Although he commended San Stefano as a "fashionable summer hotel, by the side of a sea that seems especially fresh and blue," he did not fail to note that during "the symphony concerts... [the] audience... comes not to listen but to talk; their noise is so great that from a little distance the orchestra appears to be performing a dumb show," as he writes in *Alexandria: A History and A Guide*.

In the only known prose work by the Alexandrian Greek poet Constantine P Cavafy (1863-1933), a short-story entitled "In Broad Daylight", San Stefano is the setting. The opening paragraph of the story reads:

"I was sitting one evening after dinner at the San Stefano Casino at Ramleh. My friend Alexander A., who lived in the Casino, had invited me and another young man, a close friend. As it was not an evening with music, very few people had come, and we three had the place to ourselves." When Alexander A. is through with his telling of a tale of the supernatural, his two guests find a convenient excuse in having to catch the last train: "It was now twenty-seven minutes past midnight. And since the last train for town left at twelve-thirty, we were obliged to say good night and be off in a great rush." The English translation of the story (*Grand Street*, Spring 1983), does not give the date of the work. From the reference to the trains, though, one can deduce that it was written before or around the turn of the century: in 1904 electric tramways replaced the trains in Alexandria.

Another major attraction of San Stefano's was the gambling casino, which, it is rumoured, King Farouk occasionally frequented. One Alexandrian, Panayoti Soulos, aged 90, today one of the city's wealthiest businessmen and co-owner of the Metropole Hotel, has not forgotten an evening spent gambling at the casino around 1929, when he nearly lost his entire LE6 salary (he was an accountant at the Bank of Athens at the time). Having put aside a *riyal* (twenty piastres) in his pocket for the taxi trip back to Sherif Street in downtown Alexandria, where he lived, Soulos proceeded to play roulette with the rest of his salary, losing continuously. Finally, deciding to risk having to walk back home — since the last tram had already left — he bought a chip for 10 piastres. "I won! I got back all my salary and more", he says with a grin.

San Stefano's heyday, it appears, was in the inter-war period, the so-called Long Weekend. Apart from regular features such as the tea-dances and balls, the management was not lacking in ideas for promotional galas and droll competitions. Take, for example, the Automobile Competition held there in September 1931. Sponsored by the Royal Automobile Club of Egypt, the event was attended by then Prime Minister Sedqi Pasha and the entire cabinet, as well as Prince Omar Toussoun. Apart from the expected items, there was a competition for women drivers and an "Auto-Pyjama" award offered to the lady whose pyjamas were not only the most elegant, but also the most appropriate for the car in, or sometimes above, which she was ensconced. The first prize winner in this section was Miss Amina El-Baroudi, later to become Miss Egypt, who rode atop a black car dressed in black satin pyjamas, the top trimmed with white pompoms and the trousers with fur. The event "ended late into the night, naturally with dancing, jazz and champagne", wrote a *La Réforme* reporter.

'Miss Amina El-Baroudi rode atop a black car dressed in black satin pyjamas, the top trimmed with white pompoms and the trousers with fur — and drove away with the "Auto-Pyjama" first prize'

One wintertime competition was held during the carnival, Alexandria's version of the Mardi Gras. Though other establishments in the city also held Best Costume competitions during the carnival, San Stefano's was the most prestigious. It was some time around 1922 or '23, recounts Soulos, that he and a group of friends — dressed as Scotsmen, kilts and all — filed before the jury at the San Stefano carnival gala and snatched the first prize from the rest of the competitors, who would have been dressed in the more conventional Commedia dell'Arte garb. There was also the Casino San Stefano Annual Flower Show with the prestigious Sultan Hussein Cup for the first prize, writes Hanna Wissa in *Assiout: The Saga of an Egyptian Family*.

To further ensure a regular clientele, the San Stefano Hotel also offered a "season ticket" for non-residents, providing subsidies on the services. And there was something for everyone here: tennis courts, skating rink, casino, open-air cinema, as well as concerts and the beach. Writing about the San Stefano open-air cinema in *L'Education Alexandrine*, Azza Heikal remembers the acute discomfort of the seating:

"In the evening, after the beach, we used to go at a rate of three times a week to the open-air cinema of San Stefano Casino. This was the favourite haunt of the city's gilded youth, 'a must' as we would put it today. We would attend three films in a row. They were very old American films we had already seen several times. The shrewd proprietor would change the three films every two days, to ensure a full house. We would be very badly seated on hard, uncomfortable wooden chairs, nodding off from exhaustion, chilled by the evening air, but we would patiently endure all this, as nothing in the world could have prevented us from missing a single show."

But it was not all fun and merry-making at San Stefano Hotel and Casino: affairs of state were debated there, much to the Alexandrians' amusement. The first time the cabinet met at the hotel, in 1901, journalists could not resist such headlines as "Our Ministers at the Casino!". The pre-revolutionary tradition of the cabinet moving to Alexandria in the summer (hence the city's erstwhile designation as "summer capital") demanded that quarters be found for the ministers. Eventually, the *wizara* or cabinet buildings were put up in Bulkeley: "two big, white, nondescript office blocks... where the ministers and their close aides camped during the summer", writes Robert Mabro in his monograph *Bulkeley*. "Before the construction of these buildings, the cabinet used the San Stefano hotel," he continues. One political figure who remained ever loyal to San Stefano was El-Nahhas Pasha, who always booked a suite there during the summer months.

In the late 1930s, two events were to leave their mark on the fortunes of San Stefano Hotel. With the construction of the Corniche, a project for which then Prime Minister Sidqi Pasha received much criticism, the hotel received a big blow: it lost part of its sea-front to the road and no longer enjoyed direct access to its private beach. To compensate somewhat for this loss, a tunnel linking the hotel with the beach was dug (the music kiosk remained in place) and the establishment was remodelled and modernised. To old-timers, things would never be the same again, but to newcomers, San Stefano was still the place to go.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, Alexandria's hotels, restaurants and bars boomed; San Stefano, with all its attractions, would have topped the list of most ardently frequented places, had not fate, in the form of Victoria College, intervened. On 5 September 1939, a month before the beginning of the academic year, the administration at Victoria College were informed that they were to vacate the school so that it could be converted into a military and naval hospital. "It was decided almost instantly that San Stefano was the only possible place", according to the account published in the school magazine, *The Victorian*. Although the hotel management "raised no considerable objections, ... on September 10th, the Governor of Alexandria issued two decrees, requisitioning Victoria College for use as a military and naval hospital, and requisitioning the Hotel and Casino San Stefano for the purposes of Victoria College."

The hotel management and its guests, however, did not weather the transition so smoothly. As they came down for their meals, residents "were confronted with the rather unusual sight of school desks being piled up at the end of the Casino normally reserved for the dance band. A few days later they found themselves being bricked in, as the partitions for the classrooms were being built." Meanwhile, the management was hard put to find storage space for the furniture, and until that problem was solved, "all they could do was to take furniture out of rooms and stand it in the corridors." On 9 October, the day the boarders were due back, the hotel-turned-school was given a thorough spring cleaning, and it was time for more leisurely considerations:

"We derived a good deal of incidental amusement from deciding to what purposes we should convert the various rooms of the Hotel and Casino. The harem became the Junior Prep Room, the Casino bar was turned into boys common rooms, the American Bar was fitted out as the Headmaster's Study, and the gambling tables in the Casino Club gave way to Prep School desks. A large advertisement for Stella Beer was removed only at the last moment from its place of honour over the School Entrance. And so on the morning of the 10th [October] things opened at the Casino with a different kind of swing from that previously associated with it."

The Victoria College boys took to the new premises very well. Though they had to commute to their old school for football and cricket, the San Stefano brought out their budding theatrical talents. Film director Tewfik Saleh, an Old Victorian, remembers the huge success of an end-of-year skit the pupils staged in the dining hall. "Youssef Chahine [then also a pupil at VC] played Carmen Miranda — a dancer in Hollywood films who always wore a turban with fruits when she did the samba. Youssef Chahine did a brilliant imitation — turban, bananas and all."

By the time Victoria College moved back to its buildings in Siouf in 1944, San Stefano Hotel's long absence from the scene meant that it had lost many of its clients to the new establishments that had sprouted in Alexandria. Indeed, if the Cecil Hotel figures so prominently in *The Alexandria Quartet*, it is largely because Durrell's direct experience of the city was during the Second World War, when the San Stefano was out of bounds. The gradual degentrification of the hotel is usually dated back to that period, but then the post-war period was itself witness to many societal changes, including the early waves of emigration of members of foreign communities — the cosmopolitans whose hang-out this was.

Later, in an effort to revive the hotel, the administration renovated the buildings and remodelled the façade, an endeavour which resulted in the aspect it preserves until today. "The renovations of the 1950s totally transformed the hotel into an early modern international style. The mass volumes and the regular fenestrations of this remodelling replaced the original lattice-screen and wooden verandahs," in the words of architect Mohamed Awad, head of the Alexandria Preservation Trust. It was probably at this stage, too, that the music kiosk disappeared. But an annual Cotton Queen contest was held at the open-air nightclub, in which the most beautiful woman of the evening was crowned.

Soon after the revolution, gambling was restricted to foreigners, of whom few remained. The casino was eventually turned into a ballroom, though the side-street that borders the hotel to the west still bears the name Casino Street. Then came the sequestrations of the early '60s. "The owner of the hotel at the time of the sequestrations, a Jew by the name of Barcilon, returned from a long trip and went straight to bed", says Soulos. "In the morning, he was presented with a bill."

The San Stefano and other sequestrated hotels were taken over by the public sector Egyptian Company for Hotels. The new management did not attempt major changes, and did its best to maintain the status quo. The San Stefano bar continued to draw elderly Alexandrians in search of a whiff of the old days, and the tea-garden was always crowded with families on the week-ends — this despite the proximity of the Beau Rivage Hotel (demolished in the mid-80s), with its garden and fish pond. For years, the San Stefano café remained one of the summer haunts of Naguib Mahfouz and the *harafeesh*, his inner circle of friends.

Major competition to the San Stefano came with the building of Palestine Hotel in Montaza. Purpose-built at Nasser's behest to host the 1964 Arab Summit, the Palestine was more modern, had the advantage of direct access to the beach and — unlike the San Stefano, by now surrounded with residential buildings — was set in the midst of a park.

But the San Stefano still had an asset to bank on: the sheer spaciousness of its ball-room and the open-air night-club on the sea-front made it ideally suited for media events. The San Stefano, for example, hosted the Television Festival for several consecutive years in the early '60s. The most illustrious of the international guests of the festival was Roger Moore who scandalised the audience by giving a big hug and kiss to singer Sherifa Fadel as she introduced him, recalls musician Ezzat Abu Ouf.

In '67, orders were given for the tunnel leading to the private beach to be permanently closed, presumably for fear of enemy sabotage activities. The San Stefano weathered this latest blow by turning hippy. What with the Beatles' craze and the youth culture of the late '60s, competition between hotels over pop bands was stiff. The San Stefano hired The Cats, a band headed by Ezzat Abu Ouf, which played a repertoire of heavy rock, pop and soul. This later developed, with the addition of Abu Ouf's sisters, into The 4 M, one of the first bands to introduce a heady mix of Western music and Arabic lyrics. Meanwhile, in Montaza, Les Petits Chats played at the Palestine and The Black Coats at the Haramlek. To further spice things up, an impresario called Nando Adib held an annual "Oscar" competition between the three bands at alternating venues, in the late '60s and early '70s, recounts Hani Shenouda of Les Petits Chats. "When the Oscar was held at the San Stefano, it drew in big crowds, because it was closer to town and there was no entrance fee," he adds. Abu Ouf has the fondest of memories of the hotel:

"The San Stefano Hotel brought me luck. This was where The Cats first became known. It was also at the closing ceremony of the First Alexandria Film Festival in 1979, broadcast on TV that The 4 M were introduced to the Egyptian public for the first time. And it was at the San Stefano that I met the woman who was to become my wife. A year later, we got engaged at the hotel."

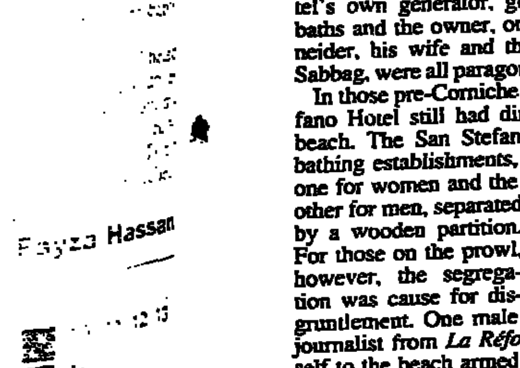
The San Stefano was to hit the international scene in 1978 as the venue for peace negotiations between Sadat and Begin. Since the negotiations were to take place in July, Alexandria was to be the setting. Although the Palestine Hotel was better equipped than the San Stefano, by virtue of its name and the pan-Arab occasion for which it was built, it would have put a damper on the occasion. So the San Stefano was modernised, with air-conditioning put in the rooms, a conference room set up and a press centre established.

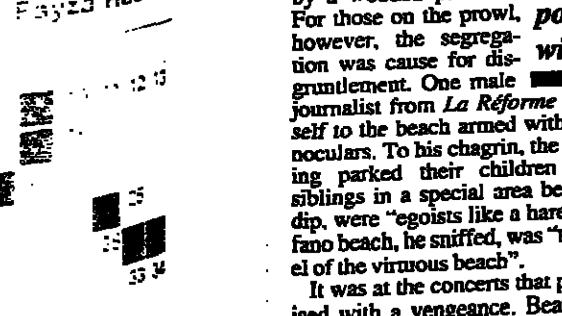
From the mid-'80s onwards, however, the hotel started declining rapidly. The private sector company which rented it proved so incompetent that it was evicted, according to sources in the hotel. Offers for its purchase were allegedly hindered by reams of red-tape in the Alexandria Governorate. The Governorate also claimed San Stefano's private beach — which obviously devalued the property drastically. Then, in January 1993, as a prelude to its privatisation, orders came from the Ministry of Tourism that the hotel be closed, with only the café outlets left open.

Set on 31,000 square metres of prime real estate, overlooking the Corniche, San Stefano occupies a unique site. Its imminent sale begs the question of what is to be done with the property, whether the buildings are to be remodelled and the grounds spruced up or, if the hotel is to be demolished, whether it should be replaced by residential tower blocks or a new hotel.

Architect Mohamed Awad of the Alexandria Preservation Trust, "certainly wouldn't mind a new hotel. The remodelling of the 1950s was not of particularly outstanding quality and certainly disfigured the original quality of architecture... Still, it has prime potential as a resort and also as a future business-conference facility hotel. Another building block or hotel should be considered, in which case the existing buildings could be remodelled... But the new investor should be bound to use it as a hotel."

Likewise, Adel Abu Zahra, secretary-general of the Association for the Friends of the Environment, is not averse to the idea of a new hotel. "The present building — which is not how the original San Stefano looked — is one of the ugliest in Alexandria. Its virtue is that it occupies a small part of the grounds. My worry would be that the new hotel would be badly built and sprawling, with little space around it", he says. Instead, he recommends that "it does not exceed six storeys, that a competition be held for the design of the new hotel, and that its architecture be in keeping with cosmopolitan Alexandria."





The circle of the warrior saint

The festival of transferring the relics of Mar Girgis is celebrated in July. **Sherine Nasr** visited the Greek Orthodox church in Old Cairo named after the Christian hero

He is one of Egypt's most loved saints. Pictures of Mar Girgis, also known as Saint George, in the historically incorrect act of slaying the dragon adorn many a wall in Christian-owned businesses throughout the country (see box).

The Mar Girgis Church in Old Cairo, one of many which the faithful frequent during the festival, conjures an incongruity that only a saint-warrior would appreciate: sanctity and war. It is perched on top of a fortress bastion. The soldier-turned-saint would have approved.

The ancient fortress of Babylon, situated 5km south of central Cairo's Tahrir Square, features several churches, mostly Coptic, and a synagogue. The towering stone structure of the Greek Orthodox Church of Mar Girgis greets you as you step out of the metro station.

Centuries ago, Persian, Greek, and then Roman soldiers doing sentry duty atop this tower would have been looking down at the river Nile instead of a metro line, and the ground surrounding the fortress would be some 10 metres lower than its current level.

The church stakes a particular claim to Biblical history. Its Greek orthodox clergy believe that the Holy Family rested there during its flight into Egypt. A similar belief is held by the nearby Coptic Church of Saint Serguis.

The church has another reason to relish its location. "The pilgrimage to Jerusalem always starts or ends in this very place," said Bishop Porphyris.

The church's large, round structure with its huge bell tower that overlooks the main street of Mar Girgis is not the same one originally built some 14 centuries ago. The earlier structure occupied the second floor of the tower and was completely destroyed in a great fire at the beginning of this century. In 1909, the present church, a larger image of its former self was built atop the tower, remarked Bishop Porphyris.

The church has a peculiar structure. Its basilica is believed to be the only round one in Egypt. The stain-glass windows surrounding the Basilica let in just enough light to illuminate the interior without breaking the spell of the fine lattice work and the exquisite icons. The Bishop savors the churc!.'s unusual shape: "The circle is a symbol of God's infinity."

Unlike Coptic churches, which commonly feature an icon of the Last Supper above the sanctuary doorway, here we have one portraying the descent of the Holy Spirit.

The iconostasis, or the screen separating the sanctuary from the rest of the basilica, depict St Mark, St Anthony, early Christianity's St Miryam the Copt, and St Mina who is, unconventionally, portrayed as a young warrior in a full armour.

"These saints all belong to the early Christian era and are recognised by all the other churches," commented Bishop Porphyris.

St John the Compassionate, a Greek Orthodox Patriarch who lived in Alexandria in the early Christian era, appears on another icon near the sanctuary's door.

Another icon depicts St Alexandra, wife of Roman Emperor Diocletian, who turned to Christianity despite her husband's cruel suppression of the emerging faith. Another icon features St Constantine, the first Christian Roman emperor.

The icon of Mar Girgis is the most ancient in the church; its survival described as "a miracle." Bishop Porphyris says the icon survived the fire that destroyed most of the church, "despite the fact that the candles lit in front of it sparked off the fire."

At the centre of the church is a stairwell leading down to the charred shell of the old church. "Here we are at the heart of history," Bishop Porphyris declared.

There is a numbing sense of timelessness as one tours the tower's three storeys. The lower floor contains two chapels that are inundated at all times except in July and August when the Nile is at its lowest. The second floor is where the old Mar Girgis Church once stood. It now houses a confessionary.

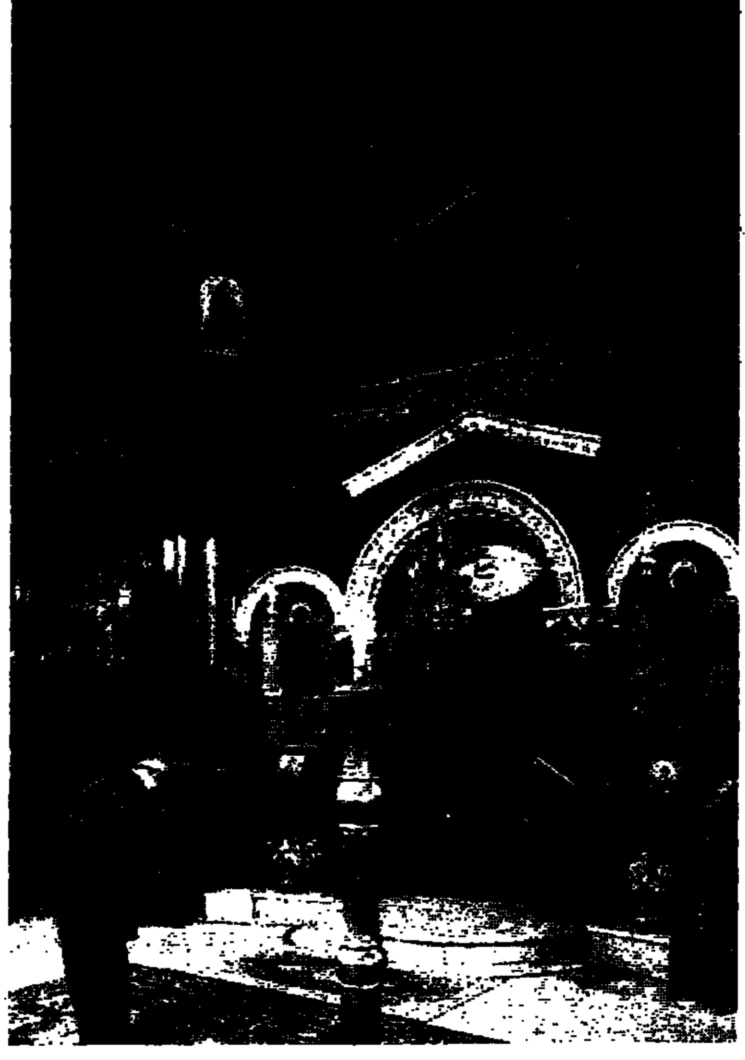
A small chapel commemorating the Flight into Egypt and another dedicated to Virgin Mary are located at the end of the spacious Greek Orthodox graveyard nearby. Both are linked to story of the Holy Family's passage into Egypt.

A narrow corridor at the far left end of the chapel of Virgin Mary takes us to a cave and a nearby well. "The Holy Family drank from this very well and it has not dried up since," said Bishop Porphyris.

One icon in the chapel shows the Virgin weaving and baby Jesus lying in a crib nearby. Another depicts the Holy Family travelling in Egypt with the Nile and Pyramids in the background.

Practical information:
The Church of Mar Girgis is open seven days a week: 9.00 AM to 5.00 PM. No entry fees. Metro station: Mar Girgis.





photos: Sherif Sonbol

Both the exterior and interior of Cairo's Mar Girgis Church boast unusual and exquisite features which attract tourists and worshippers alike

Prince of Martyrs

Soldier to Saint: According to Bishop Phillips of the Coptic Church, Mar Girgis was born in 280 AD to Anastasios, governor of Palestine. The young Girgis showed promise as an officer in the army of Emperor Diocletian. His bravery in battle won him accolades and Roman citizenship and he seemed set for a successful career, until he did something that changed his life and, arguably, history.

Officer Girgis, or Georguis, was only 20 when he disobeyed orders to harass the followers of a growing cult that the emperor was determined to destroy. He was imprisoned, tortured and killed.

His bravery in the face of torture inspired many, including the emperor's wife, Alexandra, to convert to the fledgling faith. The momentum of sympathy that followed turned the struggling cult, Christianity, into the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Saint to Legend: A knight in shining armour, mounting a white horse, kills a fire-spitting, snake-like beast and saves an attractive maiden. Churchmen asked about the legend's authenticity simply refer to the symbolism of good triumphing over evil. The historic ground for the fable is unknown. What is known is that it was appended to the saint's tradition in the centuries following his death.

Legend to England: Crusaders fighting for control over the Holy Land in the 11th century claimed that the saint came to their help under the walls of Antioch. The Normans took his legend back to England, which they had conquered earlier in the same century.

Saint George is patron saint of the Church of England.





photo: Sherif Sonbol

Al-Kebash Avenue will be restored and expanded as a major tourist site

Luxor towards 2017

Luxor, city of breathtaking antiquities, sprawling modern development and international tourism was the focus of international concern last week. **Rania Khallaf** covered a conference on the city's development

Official estimates for tourism growth in Egypt predict a seven-fold increase in foreign tourism over the next 20 years. For Luxor, this means foreign tourist numbers will reach approximately 3.5 million annually by the year 2017, up from an estimated 500,000 tourists in 1996. And while the city's antiquities will continue to draw large crowds, the "desert experience", and health and recreational tourism in the city are options which, it is projected, will be increasingly in demand in the near future. In order to cope with and plan for this influx of visitors and the attendant change in the style of tourism, the Ministry of Housing and New Communities, with the cooperation of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) convened a conference in Luxor last week to discuss the development of the city.

Although exact dates are yet to be decided, several projects were approved at the meeting. And a recurring theme of the speeches was that infrastructure and housing issues in the city should be adressed alongside those of antiquity preservation.

The starting point in the development of Luxor is the establishment of Thebes City, Ibrahim Soliman Minister of Housing said. Work on the new city started five years ago, and the infrastructure of the first stage, which includes hotels and tourist services, as well as housing units to acommodate the increasing population, has been completed.

Water services, electricity, housing and job opportunities are all issues in need of attention, according to Nadir Hadj Hammo, a UNDP representative. The UNDP, he added, has committed itself to work jointly with the Egyptian government to aid social and economic growth in the city. In addition, the US government, in cooperation with Luxor city council, is at present engaged in the expansion and improvement of Luxor's water and waste water facilities, John Westly, director of USAID, said. Of critical importance is the reduction of the water table level around Karnak Temple. In addition, the US congress fund for tourism, administered by the American Research Centre, will give a large number of grants over the next few years to cover important work at the tombs and temples of Luxor and flood control in the Valley of The Kings, he added.

Al-Kebash Avenue, which connects the Karnak and Luxor temples, is to be restored, expanded and protected as a major heritage site, Sherif El-Diwany, project consultant, said. And Mohamed Youssef, president of the Higher Council of Luxor City (HCLC), said that the old city of Luxor is being threatened by unplanned and unregulated construction, especially in the El-Gorna district and beside Al-Kebash Avenue and Karnak Temple. Under a 1989 decree, such developments were outlawed, and Old El-Gorna residents will be relocated in the near future, Youssef announced. However, the structures will be preserved as a tourist attraction, and archaeological excavations and tomb restorations will be carried out at the site, he added.

Revenue from the significant increases in HCLC and government tourism taxes, and the sale of government-owned properties for the building of tourist facilities, will be used to build healthcare, edication and recreation facilities for local residents. These new services will reduce resentment among local residents against the recreational facilities being built exclusively for tourists.

A proposal to expand Luxor Airport, from its current capacity of 2,000 passenger arrivals per day, to up to 3,500 passenger arrivals at peak season was also put forward at the conference. Airline scheduling and the quality of domestic flights are to be improved, officials added.

Antiquities in Seoul

A major exhibition of Pharaonic objects on display in Seoul marks the second anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Egypt and South Korea. **Nevine El-Aref** reports

As a first step towards a better understanding between Egypt and Korea, the South Korean and Egyptian ministries of culture have organised the first Egyptian festival in Seoul, an event that is expected to have far-reaching results, especially in attracting Korean tourists to Egypt. In addition to the exhibition of Egyptian artifacts, the Egyptian National Ballet Troupe and the Arabic Music Ensemble will perform.

According to Kim Jong Kwon, director of the Korean Information Centre in Cairo, many Koreans can hardly afford to come to Egypt so the exhibition is an excellent opportunity for them to admire Egyptian artifacts "they have learned about since primary school."

No fewer than 84 artifacts from the Cairo Museum were chosen for the exhibition. They include small gold items from the royal burials at Tanis, limestone panels from Giza and several royal statues from Luxor in alabaster, limestone and gray and pink granite. The exhibition will also comprise canopic jars, coffin lids and an unusual golden diadem dating from the Graeco-Roman period featuring Medusa. One of the most original exhibits is a board game, *senet*, a kind of chess game, which was found in Saqqara with 11 game pieces.

Although no huge monoliths could be transported abroad for the exhibition, full-size replicas of statues of pharaohs, queens and gods, as well as Tutankhamun's throne and models of Egyptian landmarks like the High Dam were sent to South Korea. "These were prepared by the Supreme Council of Antiquities in order to decorate the exhibition hall and give Koreans as comprehensive a view of Egypt as possible."

The exhibition, financed by private companies to the tune of 60 per cent while the remaining 40 per cent was paid by government companies, will last for four months. A 70-page book on the Ancient Egyptian civilisation will be distributed and a total of 700,000 visitors are expected to attend the exhibition.

This is the second exhibition of Pharaonic artifacts to be held in Asia. The first, in Japan, was cut short following an Egyptian administrative court ruling that it contained unique objects that should not have been allowed out of the country. The court reiterated in December 1994 that only antiquities that are not unique, or do not risk damage, may be put on display outside Egypt.

Year of the reef

To promote the cause of coral, 1997 has been declared the International Year of the Reef. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

With much of the world's coral under threat of destruction or serious damage, a group of concerned non-governmental organisations (NGOs), business associations and scientists have combined forces to declare 1997 as the International Year of the Reef (IYOR). Its purpose, they say, is to "highlight the importance of reefs to sustainable development and to spur conservation efforts worldwide to reverse the trend of coral reef destruction."

Diving centre owner Ayman Taher is the International Year of the Reef representative for the Red Sea port of Safaga. Together with staff from two other diving centres, he will carry out reef check campaigns from the beginning of summer.

"Large numbers of people depend on coral reefs for their food, livelihood and for the protection of the coastline they inhabit," said Taher. "However 10 per cent of the earth's reefs are seriously degraded and a much larger percentage are threatened. And it is human activity which is the major cause of that decline."

The purpose of the IYOR, according to its report, is to provide a public face for the International Coral Reef Initiative during 1997.

This monitoring network will help establish long-term national and regional programmes. In addition, a one-day rapid survey of the basic health of coral reefs by non-scientist diver groups will be held in September at over 100 sites worldwide. This programme is called Reef Check '97 and its results will be monitored via a live international satellite video link-up. In the words of Mushira Hassan, the German coordinator of Reef Check '97, the programme's purpose is "to encourage research, conservation, and educational activities relating to reef management."

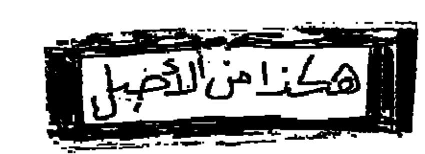
Further coral surveys will be made between 14 June and 31 August, involving single-day rapid surveys of as many reef sites as possible basic techniques, such as measuring the ratio of live to dead coral, will be used. It is this investigation in which Taher will participate.

"The work will be undertaken by teams of recreational divers with a basic knowledge of marine biology, together with at least one professional marine biologist who will be responsible for ensuring the maintenance of the scientific quality of the work," he explained. During the first week of September, a report on the basic health of a minimum of 100 reefs around the world will be made available.

In Egypt, the programme will be operated from three diving centres: Taher's Shams Safaga Diving Centre, the Sinai Divers Centre in Sharm El-Sheikh, and the Jasmin Diving Centre in Hurghada. Further activities involving the Ras Mohamed National Park are being planned.

The programme is also aiming to grab media attention by publishing a series of leaflets and issuing special awards for coral reef projects.

All in all the message IYOR is trying to get across is that there is a role for everyone — fishing communities, divers, dive operators, NGOs and the government, educators and businessmen — in safeguarding the future of coral, one of the world's most amazing and beautiful natural resources.



Gold, gold, gold!

There have been golds galore for Egypt at the Pan-Arab Games, as the national team leads the way with medals in a plethora of different sports. **Inas Mazhar** reports from Beirut

Egypt is now standing securely at the top of the Pan-Arab Games medal table with a total of 100 medals — 65 gold, 29 silver and 21 bronze. Nearest competitor Algeria is in second place with 89 medals.

Egypt was able to add an unexpected gold to its growing collection last week, when the original winner of the men's discus competition, Saudi Arabian Khalid Suleiman Khalidi, tested positive for steroids. The athlete denied taking performance enhancing drugs, and claimed that the positive reading was caused by a flu medicine.

Khalidi won the gold with a 54.90m throw last Monday. His disqualification enabled Egyptian runner-up Sameh Sayed to step into the vacant gold medal position. Nashed Doussari of Qatar moved up to take the silver and Egyptian Dia Kamel Abdel-Rahman took the bronze.

There was a debate among the organisers as to whether Al-Khalidi should also be stripped of his shotput silver medal. The Lebanese Athletics Federation contacted the International Athletics Federation in Monaco for advice, and on Monday the Lebanese federation decided against the Saudi athlete, instead awarding the silver medal to Egypt's Diaa Kamel and the bronze to Kuwaiti Abdallah Saad.

Egypt's weightlifters have really shone in these games, bringing in a full harvest of medals: 24 golds, five silvers and one bronze. On Sunday, Tharwat El-Bendari reaped three golds in the under 108kg division. He snatched 165kg, and jerked 200kg for a total of 365kg. Syria's Hussein Al-Sheikh collected three silvers in the division; bronzes went to Saudi Arabia and Algeria.

In the over 108kg category, Egypt's Hani Mahmoud won two golds, one by jerking 197.5kg and another for clearing a total of 352.5kg. Saudi Arabia's Abdallah Seif won the snatch gold with a lift of 157.5 kg. Lebanon's Hassanein Mokalled won three silvers and another Lebanese, Ali Shakair, took two bronzes. Hani Mahmoud won another bronze in the snatch.

Egypt's Omar Abul-Ela won the gold medal in golf. Teammate Ramy Taher won the event's bronze medal, and Egypt also went on to win the gold in the team event.

The Beirut Cedars cycling event was won by Egypt's Mohamed Abdel-Fattah, who covered the 107km distance in three hours, 27 minutes and six seconds. Algeria's Houshin Noureddin took the silver with a time of three hours, 29 minutes, 58 seconds. Egyptian Hussein Fadel collected the bronze with a time of 3.31.45.

Thirty-eight cyclists from eight nations — Egypt, Algeria, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, UAE, Libya and Oman — took off from the Dog River at 8.25am for the race, which covered a shorter distance than the originally-planned 130km. The change was made to avoid the problems that led to the eventual abandoning of the 50km race.

Four traffic policemen on Harley-Davidsons, with sirens wailing, cleared the coastal highway for the racers. Other policemen manned key intersections. The arrangements were supervised by the Games' organising committee, whose main aim was to avert a repetition of the chaotic traffic jams which had led to the cancellation of Friday's 50km race, scheduled to run between Chtaura and Baalbek.

Fifteen cyclists from eight countries had left the starting point in Chtaura on schedule at 9.30am, only to be caught up in appalling traffic jams on roads that were supposed to have been closed to motorists.

Officials escorting the cyclists found themselves lagging behind, unable to ascertain whether there were irregularities. Only three competitors made it to the finishing point in Baalbek. Syria's Mahmoud Katebi was first, Algeria's Soliman Abu Zeitoun came second and Oman's Youssed Sheikhi third. The others had abandoned the race.

Sheikhi had managed to escape serious injury in a crash during the race. "I was going full blast negotiating a bend when two parked cars appeared in front of me. I braked, but there was not enough space left to avert a collision. I lost control and hit one of the parked cars while another car hit me from behind," he said.

"I was knocked off my bike, but luckily I came out with only a minor cut on my finger. Anyway, I managed to get back on track to complete the race."

"It was total anarchy on the road," commented Omani coach Khalifa Jaberi. "Our competitor was put into life-threatening situations, and other racers were trapped in jams. In effect, the event cancelled itself."

Things went more smoothly in the fencing, where the national mixed team of Mohamed Fouad, Heba El-Sayed, Mohamed El-Assad and Hiam El-Daksh defeated Kuwait 20-13 to claim yet another gold medal.

Egypt were not so lucky in boxing, in which Algeria held the top position with 34 points, winning five golds, two silvers and two bronzes. Egypt came second with 23 points and two golds, four silvers and one bronze. Syria followed in the third place with 20 points — one gold, four silvers and four bronzes. Palestine won two boxing bronze medals, the would-be nation's first showing on the medal table at a Pan-Arab Games.

In judo, Egypt was placed first with six gold medals, one silver and seven bronzes. Algeria followed with four golds, three silvers and four bronzes. Tunisia was third with four golds, two silvers and four bronzes.

There were two more golds for Egypt in volleyball, where the national team defeated Algeria 3-0 to win the men's event. The women's team won all their matches, defeating Lebanon 3-0 in the final.

Meanwhile, on the shooting range, Egyptian marksman Ayman Mazhar snatched the double-trap gold medal from the Lebanese George Shamoun, who had to make do with the silver. Saudi Arabia's Ahmed Al-Asmari won the bronze.

In table tennis, the Egyptian men's team, consisting of Ashraf Sobhi, Ashraf Helmy and Ahmed Saleh, defeated Morocco 3-0 to win yet another gold. The women's team, comprising Sherine El-Alfi, Bathina Othman and Gehan El-Sayed, also took gold by beating Algeria 3-0 .

Egypt is expected to grab at least 50 medals in the swimming events, which began on Monday. All hopes are pinned on the 'Golden Fish' Rania Elwani, Mediterranean Games freestyle gold medalist. She is predicted to win gold in all the nine events she is taking part in, and so far, it looks as if this prediction may be realised. Egypt snatched four medals out of the six contested on Monday. Two of these were Elwani's — the 200m women's backstroke and the 200m women's medley. She also played a part in the gold medal-winning performance of the women's four by 100m relay team. Meanwhile, Shamseddin Shams clinched the men's 100m breaststroke, with teammate Mohamed Safi coming in second.

The Egyptian men's team failed to do so well in the four by 200m relay. They were left in the silver medal position behind gold medalists Algeria. In the men's 400m freestyle, Hesham Al-Masri of Syria won the gold, Egypt's Hani El-Tayer took the silver.

One event still hanging in the balance is tennis. In the men's quarterfinals, Egypt's Jihad El-Deeb beat Syrian Rabi Abu Hassoun, while Algerian Abdel-Haq Hamr Al-Ain beat Lebanese Hisham Al-Zaateni. Another Egyptian, Amr Ghanem, and Moroccan Talal Wahabi have already qualified for the semifinals.



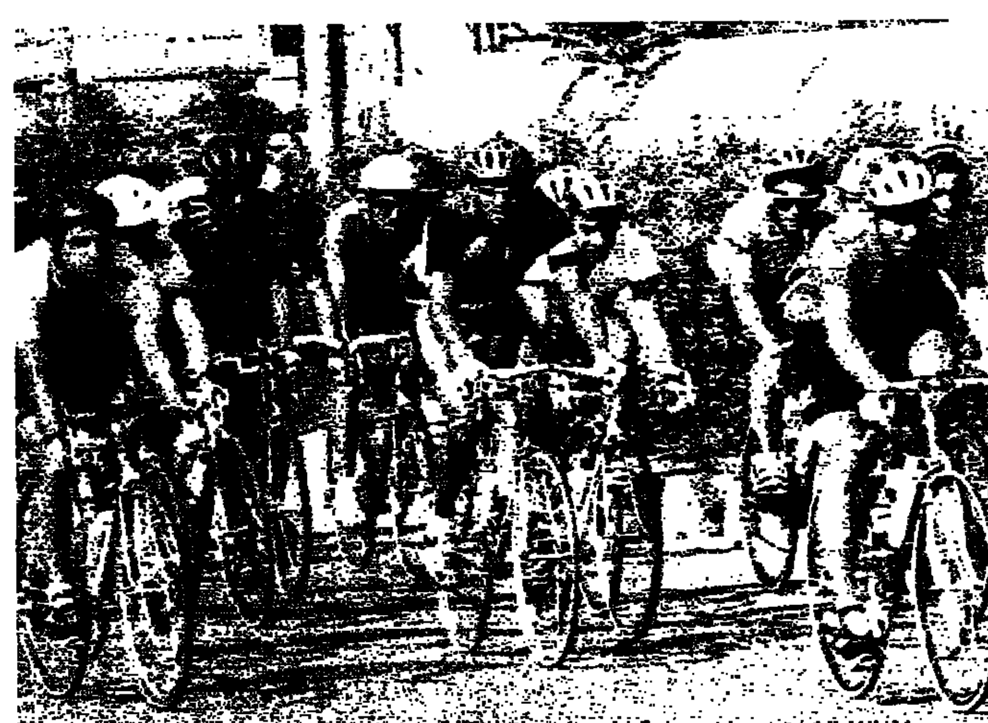
Rania Elwani on the way to her third gold medal in the 100 metres butterfly *(photo: AFP)*



Lift off: Refaat Ali strains to lift 175 kilos to win one of his two gold medals for Egypt *(Photo: AFP)*



The heavyweights: Egypt's Heba Rashid floors Syrian Wadha'a Mahmoud *(photo: AFP)*



Cyclists in the 130km race ride through Jouniyeh, north of Beirut *(photo: Reuters)*



Algeria's Mohamed Bin Kasuma (L) clashes with Egypt's Amr Mustafa *(photo: AFP)*

Ibrahim gets better and better

Ali Ibrahim forges ahead yet again, to take second place in the World Cup Rowing Championships. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** reports

Egypt emerged from the rowing World Cup, an event held at different locations over a two-month period, with a second placing — for Ali Ibrahim in the skiff (single oarsman) event — and some degree of bad feeling among the team about their treatment at the hands of officials and their lack of recognition by the media.

Egypt participated in three events in the first stage of the Cup in Munich. Ali Ibrahim took second place in the skiff. Abdu Emeira, Al-Aqiq Mohamed, Kamal Hassan and Hamdi El-Qot took eighth place in the coxless fours, and Tarek Hamed and Shams Ahmed were 12th in the coxless pairs. These performances were sufficient to qualify all the Egyptian participants for the second stage in Paris between 19 and 23 June.

For reasons unknown, but suspected to be mainly financial, the Egyptian Rowing Federation allowed only Ali Ibrahim to travel to Paris. He performed well, once again taking second place. He then joined his teammates, who were by now feeling depressed and neglected by both the federation and the press, for the Mediterranean Games in Bari.

In Bari, Ali Ibrahim won the silver medal in the skiff, while the coxless four took fourth place. Coxless rowing is a new event for the Egyptian team, and once again the team felt that their efforts were not acknowledged. "Our coach decided to train us in coxless rowing because it's quite a difficult event," explained Kamal Hassan, one of the four. He added: "We haven't been honoured in any way for our achievement at Bari. People should bear in mind that although we are new to the event, we finished the race only three seconds behind the winners — not like the old days when we would often come in 40 seconds behind."

However, failing to be honoured for his achievement at Bari was soon to become the least of Hassan's worries. On his return to Egypt he was slapped into prison thanks to a bureaucratic error by the federation. Hassan is currently doing his military service, and the federation had forgotten to apply for an official leave of absence for the 48 days he was away representing Egypt in international competitions. He stayed in prison for six days before the problem was resolved.

By the time the third stage of the World Cup was played, this time in Switzerland from 9 to 11 July, Ali Ibrahim, exhausted from almost 50 days of continuous international competitions, was only able to manage sixth place. However, the total number of points he had gained in the course of the championship were sufficient to leave him in second place overall. The great improvement in Ibrahim's performance becomes clear when his record is compared to that of the Slovenian who beat him to win the World Cup. He was the skiff world champion in 1995 and came fourth in the Atlanta Olympics in '96. Last year Ibrahim came sixth in the World Cup; he was seventh in Atlanta '96. The Slovenian has lost to Ibrahim twice this year — in Egypt and in Italy.

Ibrahim's Italian victory brought him the gold medal and the title of best oarsman in the Pied De Luco Championship in Italy in May, in competition with oarsmen from 20 countries. The coxless fours took third place and the coxless pairs came in fourth in this championship.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Congratulations to Egypt

on the opening of the first stage of Egypt's great achievement

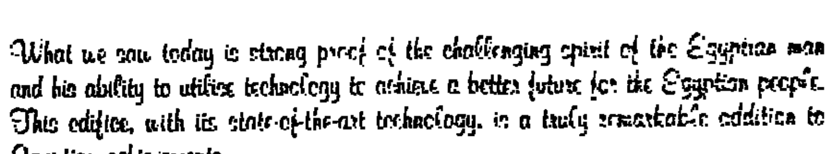
ACAPI Egypt Pharmaceuticals

in Badr City



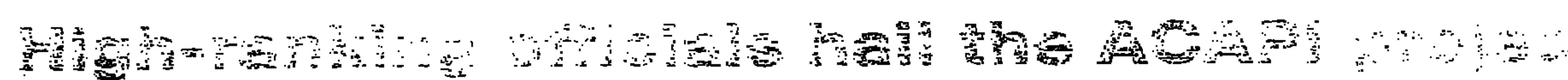




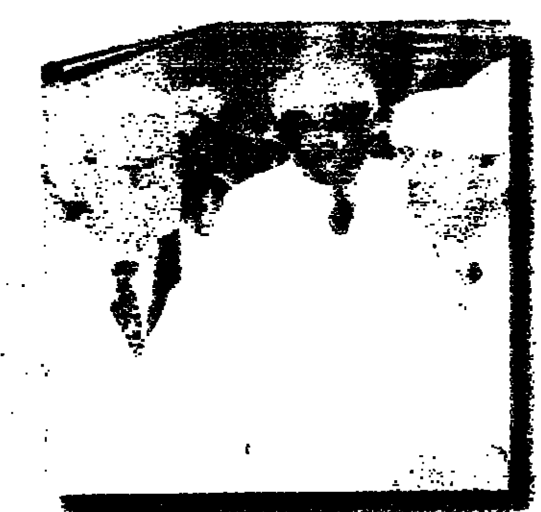


What we saw today is strong proof of the challenging spirit of the Egyptian man and his ability to utilise technology to achieve a better future for the Egyptian people. This edifice, with its state-of-the-art technology, is a truly remarkable addition to Egyptian achievements.
May God crown your efforts with success.

Ismail Sallam
15/7/1997



High-ranking officials hail the ACAPI project

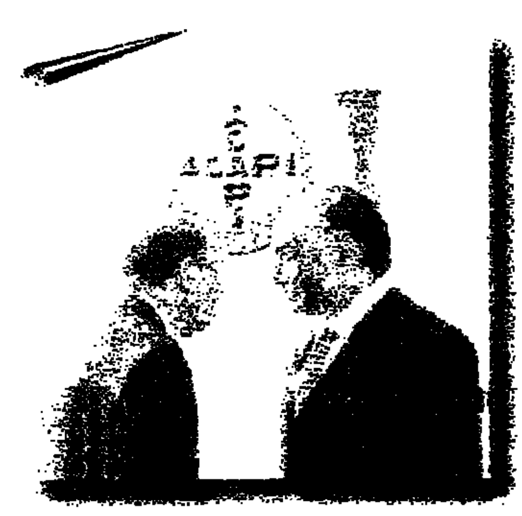




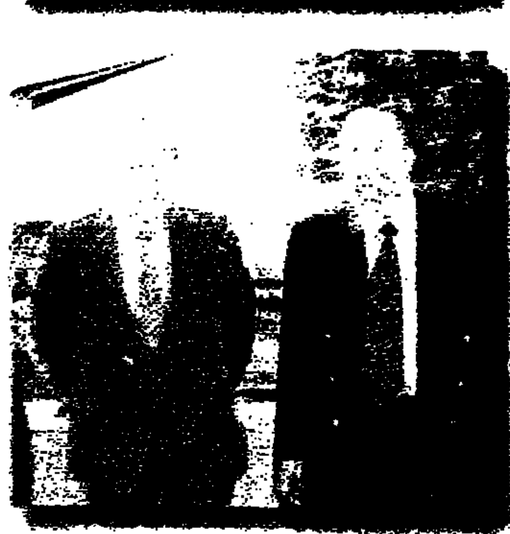












It was an infinite pleasure for me to visit this outstanding industrial complex and see the outstanding level of the pharmaceutical industry, which is of particular significance.
I wish you constant success.

Suliman Reda
Minister of Industry

I was happy to pay a visit to an American-European-Egyptian pharmaceutical factory which is on par with major factories abroad.
Good Luck.

Mohamed Ibrahim Suliman
Minister of Housing

I'm extremely happy with what I saw today. I wish to see the number of such achievements grow. This is proof that the Egyptian people and industrialists are the sons of the Pharaohs.
Congratulations.

Mohamed Farid Khamis
Chairman of
the Egyptian Industries Federation

Our visit to ACAPI in Badr City is further proof of the steady rate of investment in Egypt in the second generation of investment cities. Therefore, we are optimistic of a better, more prosperous future for our people under the leadership of President Mubarak.
My regards to all the workers and my wishes for constant success.

Dr. Ibrahim Fawzi
Head of the Investment Authority

Dear Dr. George Basili,
I felt happy today. I wish you the best of luck.
Congratulations.

Dr. Fouad Iskandar

We paid a visit to the **ACAPI** Pharmaceutical Factory in Badr City, in the company of Hassan El-Alfi, minister of interior, Suliman Reda, minister of industry, Dr. Ibrahim Fawzi and Dr. Hussein El-Gammal. We saw the great factory which will staff 1,000 workers. Our wishes of success.

Maher Abaza
Minister of Electricity

Hassan El-Alfy
Minister of Interior

It gives me great pleasure to visit **ACAPI**. The Social Fund for Development will provide **ACAPI** with all the necessary support to boost development.

Dr. Hussein El-Gammal

ACAPI Egypt Pharmaceuticals gains the confidence of the world

